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INDIAN ART

a short introduction

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KATHAKALI

The Sacred Dance-Drama of Malabar

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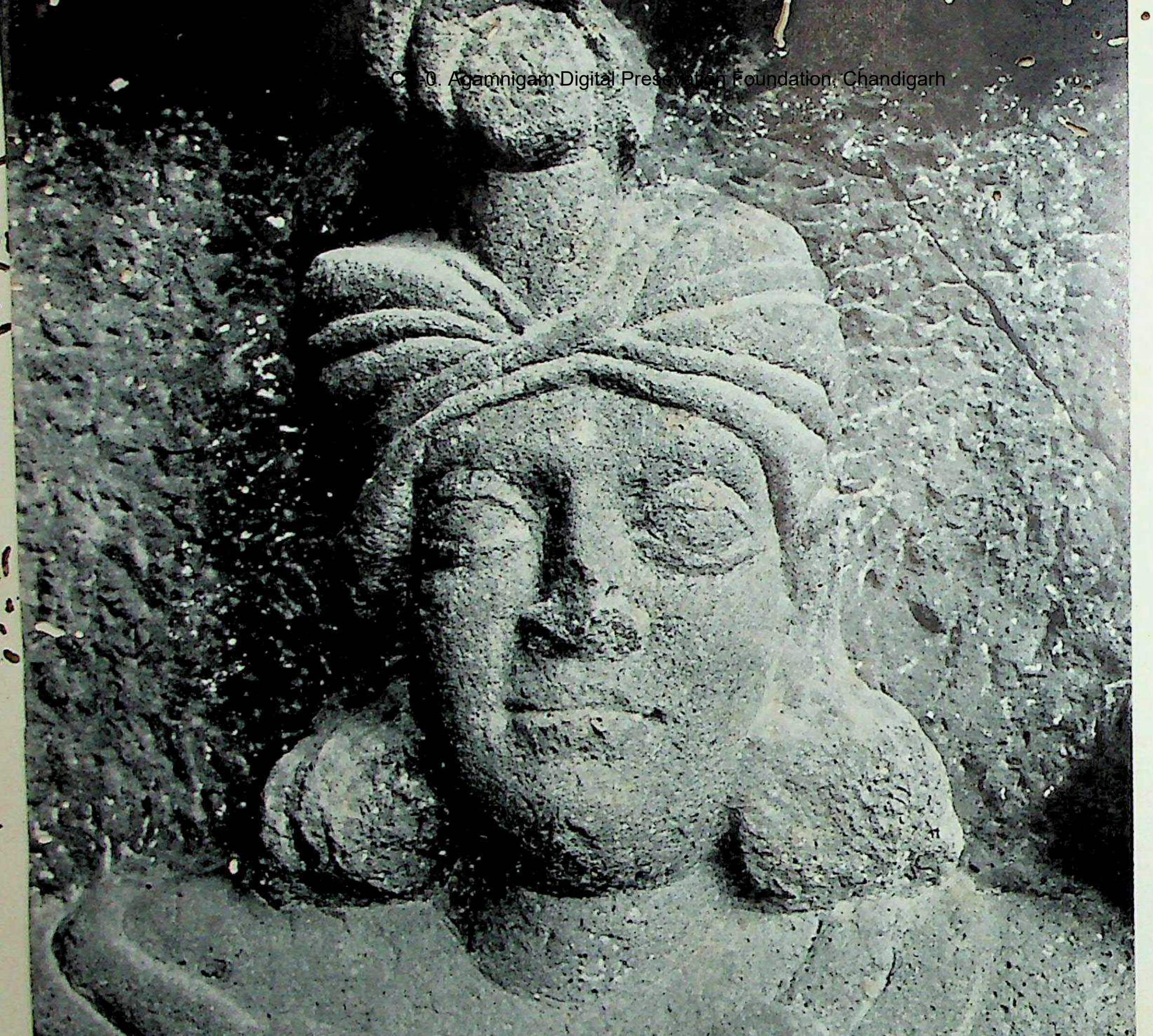

Bust of a male figure from Karla, 1st Century A.D.

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by

K. BHARATHA IYER

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Foreword

INDIAN ART, till the advent of Dr. Coomaraswamy on the scene, was more or less a closed book to scholars as well as laymen. Sculpture, painting and architecture were treated by western scholars as objects of mere curiosity whose aesthetic and technical achievements fell far short of western standards. Roused by the misconceived approach to Indian art Dr. Coomaraswamy put forward with great vigour the native view-point, laying stress on the symbolical, metaphysical and aesthetic background without a knowledge of which it is almost impossible to comprehend the subtleties of Indian art. His writings, presented with convincing logic and careful analysis, helped to put Indian art in the category of the great arts of the world. Coomaraswamy, in his own persuasive and forceful way, turned the apathy and at times actual hostility of art historians into sympathetic understanding. As a matter of fact, it would be idle to deny that it was Coomaraswamy who for the first time laid down sound principles for the history of Indian art, which, before he came on the scene was a curious mixture of undigested archaeology, pedantic views and a western approach to thoroughly Indian concepts.

But, in spite of the great contributions of Dr. Coomaraswamy and some later writers, Indian art remained the prerogative of scholars and students. It remained aloof from the general public as the cost of art publications was so high that even libraries were hesitant to acquire them, not to speak of art enthusiasts with much lesser resources.

With Indian independence, however, there were significant changes in the attitude of western art critics as well as of the Indian Government and educated classes. Shedding the prejudices peculiar to a ruling race, western art critics began trying to understand the Indian view-point and the Indian Art Exhibition held in London in the wake of Independence encouraged the study of Indian art as well as its appreciation by the common people.

An exhibition was also held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, and was followed by an attempt to take Indian art to the masses by the publication of cheap literature, both by the Central and, to a lesser extent, the State Governments. With the establishment of the Lalit Kala Akadami, a scheme for publications on Indian art has been set up, and its organisers are trying their best to live up to the international standards in art publication and, at the same time, see that the cost of the books published is reasonable so that they may be bought by a large number of people.

All said and done, the appreciation of Indian art both in this country and abroad is still in its infancy. The reasons for this are not far to seek. The wider appreciation of Indian art depends on several factors such as the recognition of Indian art as a vital force in secondary and university education and the availability of cheap, well-written and well-illustrated works on Indian art, which students and art lovers with limited means can afford. Unfortunately such works are still not available, and any effort to fill up this lacuna is welcome.

Mr. Bharatha Iyer, the author of this book, is well known as an enthusiast of Indian art, and his work on Kathakali, the popular dance-drama of Malabar, is written with deep understanding and affection for this wonderful art form. *Art and Thought*, the Coomaraswamy commemoration volume which he edited, was a labour of love, and the present work is also an outcome of the warm intimacy which he has with Indian art. His work in Government service would seem to leave him little time for studies in Indian art but how deeply grounded he is in it is apparent in the ease with which he deals with rather controversial points.

In 'Ideals of Indian art—A General Survey', Mr. Iyer deals very aptly with fundamental difficulties with which the casual observer of Indian art is faced. Ancient Indian art is so closely associated with the Indian way of life and philosophy that without their understanding the outward manifestations of art lose much of their meaning. Indian art, as Mr. Iyer rightly points out, is bound within the great framework of Indian tradition which is closely integrated

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with Indian life. The word tradition, in the Indian context, is often misunderstood and is frequently associated with the decadent past, which is holding out tenaciously against progress. Indian tradition, in its wider concept, is comparable to a mighty ocean which though receiving its waters from various rivers yet retains its individual character. India, in its long chequered history, did not feel hesitant to imbibe many cultural traits from foreign races and tribes, but in the course of time there is observable a superstitious love for the past that hindered the free expression of artistic sentiment; and it was to this attitude of mind that Kalidasa referred when he warned his audience against assuming that everything that is old is necessarily good.

In his chapter on 'The Language of Indian Art' Mr. Iyer deals in a simple and straightforward manner with the symbolism of Indian art. Those who are not acquainted with this visual language of great coherence and logic can at best have a surface enjoyment of Indian art but no sooner do they understand its significance than a new world of amazing richness and depth is revealed to them. Speculation has no place in the language of Indian symbolism. The mind conceives abstract metaphysical thought in the terms of certain natural or material phenomena and art translates those thoughts through appropriate symbols. But this should not mean that all symbols in Indian art reflect metaphysical thoughts. In the absence of an anthropomorphic image of the Buddha in early Indian art, his presence is indicated by certain objects closely associated with his life. As a matter of fact, an analysis of Indian symbols shows that they were drawn from various sources such as primitive cults of mother worship and tree worship, water cosmology etc. As Mr. Iyer rightly points out, these symbols in Indian art are not the exclusive property of a particular religion. From the common treasure-house of Indian symbols, the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, all borrowed, and though they interpreted the time-honoured symbols according to their own belief, there is no doubt that, as evinced by Vedic literature, their original meaning was the same. Mr. Iyer also deals with the *mudras*, gestures, postures, attributes, motifs, etc., bearing in mind the requirements of an average reader.

FOREWORD

Mr. Iyer's chapter on 'Principal Hindu Deities' describes the principal Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu Pantheon. Hindu iconography is a rather complex subject and in keeping with the requirements of an average reader, it has to be treated with discrimination and clarity. The learned author has achieved this successfully and it is hoped that in the future he will extend this approach to Buddhist and Jain iconography as well.

Since the appreciation of all art in the primary stages is inevitably visual, the necessity of good photographs cannot be overstressed. It is encouraging to note the fine quality of photographs that have begun to appear in our art publications. Mr. Iyer has indeed chosen from amongst the very best examples so that the book is also a delight to the eye. It is hoped that many more books of this type will appear in the future and play their part in making this almost forgotten part of our heritage understood and appreciated by all our people.

Moti Chandra
Director
Prince of Wales Museum
of Western India, Bombay

Bombay
14 May 1958

Author's Preface

THE STUDY and appreciation of Indian art have had little place in the thoughts of the average educated Indians. Modern education, which has scarcely any roots in the cultural heritage of the country, has succeeded in de-Indianising most of them in more ways than one and put them out of step with the modes of traditional order, its ideals and conventions. Understandably enough, they look askance at works of Indian art often with a sense of bewilderment. They regard the seeming 'unrealism' of these works as an alarming sign of incapacity to spell out form correctly and well and are prone to dismiss them as the products of a less mature age.

Happily the State emphasis on art and culture and the increasing interest shown by the press and cultural bodies in recent years have stimulated a wider interest in Indian arts and crafts. There is a desire to know and understand, and therefore a publication of this nature appears to be timely. The capacity to understand and appreciate is certainly inherent in all; what the modern average Indian needs is only some help, a guide, to 'remind' him of the significance of the traditional forms and its diverse manifestations. Such guidance is all that this work attempts to give. There are indeed a number of invaluable and authoritative works on Indian art. Most of them are beyond the reach of the ordinary Indian reader as they are either costly, and not freely obtainable or too advanced for him. Nor has a beginner, invariably, the inclination and leisure to browse through large volumes on the subject. This book has grown out of the talks given to several interested friends and is likely to prove of assistance to those who wish to be initiated into the language of Indian art. It is hoped that it will foster in them an understanding and love of the artistic heritage of this country. If it does, the writing of this book will not have been in vain.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I am particularly grateful to my esteemed friends Pramod Chandra and S. S. Batliwala for their kindly interest in this venture, for helpful suggestions, and for securing several new and beautiful illustrations. My indebtedness to Dr. Moti Chandra for examining the manuscript and for writing a valuable Foreword is indeed great. I am also thankful to Ramaswamy R. Iyer and R. Gopalakrishnan for suggestions, and to S. T. Kenghe for preparing the Index. Every care has been taken to acknowledge the sources of the illustrations used in this book and any error or omission in this regard is not intentional.

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18 *May* 1958

K. BHARATHA IYER

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1. The Ideals of Indian Art—A General Survey

TO THE CASUAL observer, the understanding of Indian art—be it sculpture, painting or dancing—presents certain difficulties. But they are not insuperable nor really so formidable as may appear.

As an essential preliminary to the understanding of Indian art it is necessary to acquaint oneself with the background which made its distinctive evolution possible. It is bound up with India's past. That past has been a great one, stretching over an immense expanse of time. During this period a great many events took place which have left their indelible impression on Indian culture and character. Many tribes and races such as the Aryans, Parthians, Greeks, Sakas, Kushanas, Huns, Turks and Mongols made this land their home. They brought with them their indigenous cultures and then merged with the races already here. This mingling of races and cultures and their absorption into what may be called the mainstream of Indian civilization proved to be a significant historical process rich with many possibilities. This mainstream, as is well known, is largely the product of the fusion of the great Dravidian and Aryan cultures.

From a very early date, at least from 1500 B.C., the Indian mind evinced extraordinary interest in such problems as the nature of the universe, of the self and its relation to Godhead. Intellectual life functioned vigorously and almost continuously down to the eighteenth century. During this long period there emerged great spiritual movements like Brahminism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and various systems of philosophy. These profoundly affected the life and work of the people, giving them an ethical basis.

God was conceived as formless, as an Immanent Principle, as Pure Intelligence ; also as possessing forms innumerable, sometimes having many heads and many arms. These multiple forms and multiple heads and arms were but a symbolic device to suggest His varied and superhuman qualities. Understood in this way, there is nothing disturbing in the Indian icons or sculptures with several arms and heads. According to the Hindu view, the whole Universe is His form and countless are His attributes. How could one depict so colossal and so magnificent a conception? It could only be suggested and that too by symbols. Thus suggestion and symbol[1] became significant traits of the language of Indian art. True likeness and anatomical exactitude which are the features of a realistic or representational art were eschewed, because they were the methods of copyists. Indian artists did not copy from models or what is seen merely by the physical eye. Their models, if they had any, were the "visions" or "mental images" seen while in deep contemplation. In this way Indian art was supremely creative and was the result of contemplation. It did not copy nature but only imitated it in the way it functioned. Being a creative force it has its own laws in respect of form.

In speaking of Godhead with form, it is necessary to remember that the various gods and goddesses were not regarded as separate and competing entities. They are different aspects of the same central deity seen in one or other of His innumerable forms and qualities. In evolving this magnificent conception of a hierarchy as the radiations of a single Supreme Being, Hinduism not only resolved all conflicting loyalties bound to arise in a scheme of varied deities but also arrived at the most profound and comprehensive idea of Godhead. These personal aspects of Godhead, seen variously as the creator in Brahma, the preserver in Vishnu, the destroyer in Siva, the remover of obstacles in Ganesa, the bestower of plenty in Lakshmi and as knowledge in Sarasvati, furnished Indian art with innumerable motifs, just as they encouraged the emergence of the cult of *bhakti* or devotional mysticism.

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[1] "Indian symbols of art voice the same truth as Indian philosophy and myth. They are signals along the way of the same pilgrim's progress directing human energies to the same goal of transmutation. Our task, therefore, as students of Indian myth and symbol, is to understand the abstract conceptions of India's philosophical doctrines as a kind of intellectual commentary on what stands crystallised and unfolded in the figures and patterns of symbolism and art, and conversely to read the symbols as the pictorial script of India's ultimately changeless wisdom."—Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization.*

Briefly stated, the Hindu view is that life is essentially a spiritual progression ; its central purpose is self-realization; that knowledge is divine in origin and that its purpose and justification are found in its efficacy in promoting self-realization by cutting away all bonds of ignorance. "Lead me from the Unreal to the Real, from Darkness to Light." This has been the prayer of India from times immemorial. The arts—poetry, drama and dance, painting, sculpture and music—were all sacred and designed for spiritual awakening.[2] The arts were not mere diversions or an escape from life. They were not chains to bind man more firmly to the earth; they gave wings to the aspirations of his soul. They lent delight and enchantment to the life here which is but the precursor of the timeless delight in which the Ātman, or soul, dwells when it is free from its earthly ties.

Art in India was seen as a way of life and was largely utilitarian in purpose; that is to say the theory of "art for art's sake"[3] scarcely influenced or determined Indian art. This is not to imply that the arts such as music, dancing and portrait painting were not cultivated as individual accomplishments. It is only that these achievements, however encouraged and prized, remained within the tradition. The sharp distinction now drawn between the fine arts and the useful arts was never considered to be of such importance as to exalt the former to the degradation of the latter. The range of crafts or the useful arts was very wide. The jeweller, the silversmith, the blacksmith and other metal-workers, the wood-carver, the weaver, the dyer, the potter, the stone-cutter and the carpet-maker, all made articles of utility combined with beauty (Pl. LXXII). Even a poor Indian home was not devoid of the delight in shapes and colours. The beautiful *rangoli* designs drawn by Hindu women every morning on the thresholds of their homes, the variegated patterns of the pots, of the brass and copper vessels and lamps, the beautiful garlands with which the household deity is adorned, the gold and silver ornaments, the colours and designs of the sarees and other articles of daily use, invest the Hindu homes with beauty. The temples of imposing architecture adorned with sculpture and painting; the festivals and the dramas and dances associated with religious rites; the wandering story-teller versed in legend, poetry and the teachings of religion; all these brought culture and the arts very near to the daily life of the people.

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[2] "Art contains in itself the deepest principles of life, the truest guide to the greatest art, the Art of Living. The true life, the idea of Indian culture, is itself a unity and an art, because of its inspiration, by one ruling passion, the desire to realise a spiritual inheritance. All things in India have been valued in the light of this desire."—Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism.*

[3] It would be useful to remember here that the Indian artist who made the Buddha image or the images of gods and goddesses did not do so for art's sake but for use in worship.

The arts in this way were integral to life. They were not luxuries and were never seen, until recently, in isolation from life and as idle individual accomplishments expressing personal idiosyncrasies. A purely personal art had no place in the Indian tradition. The artist and the onlooker shared a common inspiration. Suffice it to say that Indian art remained truly national in the widest and deepest sense of the term because its ideals were the ideals of the nation and its canons were well understood by the people.

The architects who built the marvellous shrines of India, the artists who painted the exquisite frescoes at Ajanta, Bāgh, Sittanavāsal and Kānchīpuram, remain unknown to us. Who are the great sculptors who have covered this land from one end to the other with their superb masterpieces in stone and bronze ? Who conceived the image of the Buddha in meditation and who was the master who wrought the dancing figure of Nataraja? These questions, so momentous to us who look at art divorced from its setting, are meaningless in the context of the Indian tradition. The artist, whoever he was, was only voicing or giving shape to the visions and ideals of the race. There was nothing purely personal in it. This anonymity of Indian art only emphasises its truly national character.

When we speak of Indian art as religious, it is not to be understood that it was the expression of a particular dogma or creed or that it was other-worldly and puritan. Religion in India means the Great Path, not a narrow exclusive church or cult devoted to the glorification of any particular deity or dogma. Its definite purpose was

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liberation (*moksha*) by removing ignorance (*avidya*). It covered all phases and activities of an individual's life seeking to create in him an attitude or outlook conducive to the attainment of that goal. The infusion of the religious attitude into the normal activities of life eliminated to a great extent the possibilities of the secular and the sacred coming into opposition. Even the emergence of certain extreme ascetic ideals was unable to suppress the inherent capacity of the Indian mind to enjoy the pleasures of life. According to the Indian view, life has four definite ends or purposes. They are *dharma* (the discharge of duties and responsibilities and the practice of virtue), *artha* (the acquisition of wealth for use), *kāma* (the enjoyment of the pleasures of life) and finally *moksha* (freedom from a sense of want or desire). This scheme of life is far removed from any attempt at a rejection of the world. The warning very often given is not against the enjoyment of worldly pleasures but against the temptation to lose sight of the goal by making pleasure the end of life. So it was said repeatedly that man should be like the lotus thriving in water but never allowing water to stick to it or to submerge it. The exaltation of the ideal of *grihasta* (householder) and the sanctity attached to the performance of duties, which are regarded as leading to the emancipation of the soul, emphasise in no uncertain way the importance attached to worldly life. Indian thought invariably progressed in the direction of achieving a synthesis or unity of the worlds of spirit and matter, and they were seen not as antagonistic to each other but as complementary and vitally related. This view is fully reflected in Indian art. The whole drama of life with its pulsating passions and varying moods and activities are richly represented. Since the world here is but the reflection of the other world of spirit, there is no contradiction between the rich sensuousness of Indian art and its religious intentions. The gods and goddesses and even the ascetic Buddha are conceived in the most captivatingly sensuous forms, and as ever youthful and radiant.[4]

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[4] "They are angelic figures full of sensual spirituality, of a subtle unearthly voluptuousness. Shining forth from them is their delight in the glorious impalpability of their bodies. Their corporeal incorporeality is a sublime form of *Māya*. The melodious musical character of their bodily charm is rendered through a delicate articulation and joyous vitality of their limbs and contours. Distinctive bodily

Because of this rare synthesis, the abundant and revealing forms of the female figures in Indian art do not leave in our minds the impression that we are gazing on unclothed beauty. Invariably, so radiant is the utterance of the spirit and so much is it associated with grace and charm that the flesh does not obtrude into it. In the best of Indian sculpture, as Dr. Coomaraswamy points out, the flesh and spirit are inseparable, achieving a rare and true aesthetic monism. Another notable characteristic of Indian art is its constant expression of the sense of unity of all life, a view universally held in India from very ancient times. All life, whether human, animal or vegetable, is a variation on a single theme. Even the Buddha passed through several lives during which he was born as an animal or a bird. Man is in harmony with nature and their fellowship is celebrated in an impressive array of sculptured and painted scenes during centuries of Indian art expression.

The growth of metaphysics, of ritual and iconography never succeeded wholly in drowning the voice of humanism in Indian art. A great deal of mediæval and later art of India is concerned with Paurānic Hinduism. The super-world that the *Purānas* have created is only a glorified form of this world of ours. The gods and goddesses with their blissful domestic felicity are the supreme ideals. Man and woman discover their inseparable selves in the *Ardhanārīsvara* (the half-male and half-female form of Siva). Overwhelmed with the love and devotion of Pārvati Siva remained inseparable from her. The world is fully there but we are allowed to look at it mostly through the lens of mythology.

The main interest of the Indian artist, it will be noticed, is the human form. It was an unending source of creative joy to him. The teeming array of figures in Indian art is itself something phenomenal, something indisputably worldly. The figures of men and women are depicted from every possible angle, they are caught in a thousand attitudes in the course of rhythmic movements both

features are as far as possible ignored; the male and female figures resemble each other as closely as sex differences permit; they are like twin brothers and sisters, conceived in the one spirit of subtle charm and unearthly bliss."—Heinrich Zimmer: *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization.*

instinctive as well as studied. Such variegated and lovely patterns made by the body when swayed by the playful forces of emotion and deliberation can hardly be found in the art of any country. The abundance of female figures in Indian art of all periods displaying the varied charms of womanhood is another striking trait that hardly fits in with other-worldly intentions and the religious bias which have been attributed to Indian art.

Indian art remained a collective expression of the racial experience of the people. As was said earlier, India has manifested a peculiar genius to assimilate and absorb foreign element so well as to leave hardly any trace of the original influence. This pronounced trait in the Indian character exerted a profound influence in shaping the social order, culture and art of India. The process of absorption and giving a "new look" to the older features was a long one extending from the Vedic age far down into the mediæval period of Indian history.

Aryanisation did not uproot the old indigenous culture. Much of popular Hinduism is of non-Aryan origin. In the Vedic period Brahma was not an important deity. Vishnu had hardly emerged; he exists in association with the Sun-God Surya. Siva appears to be a later adaptation. In course of time this non-Aryan deity arose in majestic splendour as a great god, unexcelled, and found his place in the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva). This evolution and fusion are extraordinarily symbolised in the conception of *Trimurti* (the trinity) which is a classic example and concretisation of the historical process referred to.

Hinduism grew like a rambling mansion, housing varied beliefs ranging from the worship of trees and serpents to the worship of the great and gracious gods like Siva and Vishnu, and Īsvara, the Supreme One, in whom all these merged; and all of these conceptions were incorporated in Hindu art. Thus varying lower orders of faiths were used as steps to arrive at the zenith of the Highest. This vast pyramidal structure represented the collective expression of the Indian mind.

Now, look at a Hindu temple with its outer shrines and pillared halls, all carved with countless figures of gods and goddesses, human beings and animals and trees, illustrating legend and depicting the great drama of life and symbolising the whole world of our physical perception, the immense structure gradually soaring to the finale, where there is nothing left except the Void, and looking like a mighty human aspiration to reach the Unknown. It would be difficult to imagine anything more typical of the strange evolution of Hinduism than the temple.

At the very outset it is necessary to correct any misconception likely to arise from the use of religious designations like Hindu, Buddhist and Jain. They should not be understood as representing distinct and separate art traditions. These terms are used only to denote the subject matter which was derived from the lore of these particular religions and employed in the creation of monuments devoted to these faiths.

In speaking of Indian art, it should be remembered that it is the art of a vast sub-continent and has a long history with well-developed conventions. Therefore, it would be wrong to generalise or to limit its character and qualities. The ideals that shaped it and the qualities it developed are many. Indian genius is varied as the facets of a diamond which reflects different lights and colours. Like Proteus it has constantly changed its colours and manifestations. From century to century and from region to region, variations in style can be clearly traced. It is like a mighty flowing stream glowing with the reflections of the times.[5]

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[5] Gladstone Solomon, "India's Message in Art", *Statesman*, July 11, 1937.

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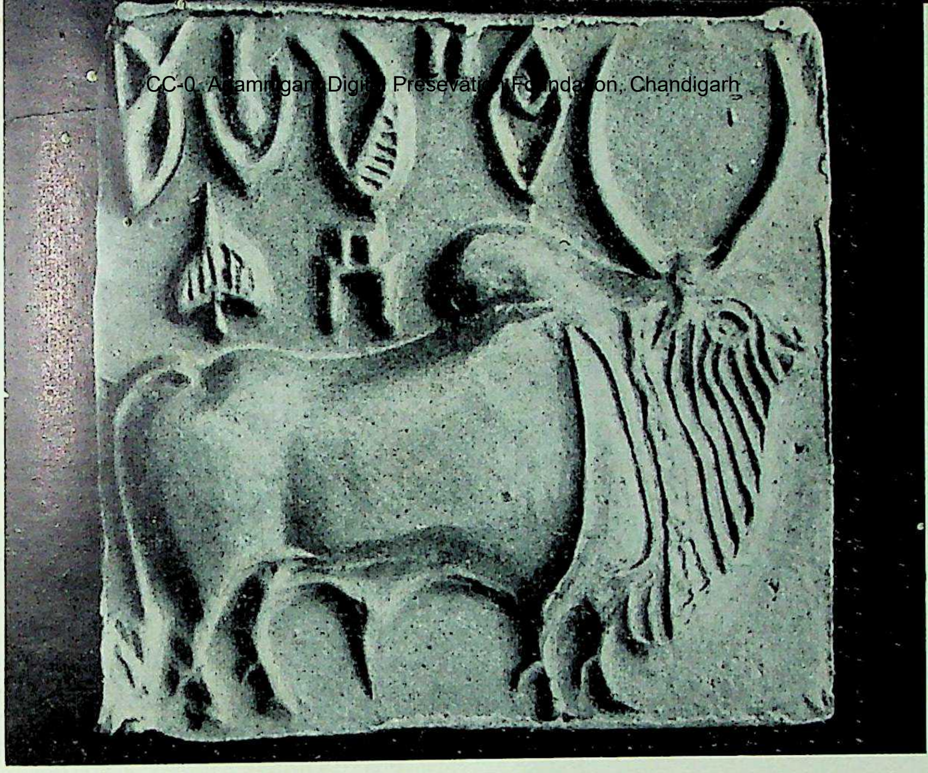
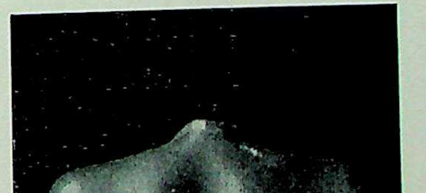
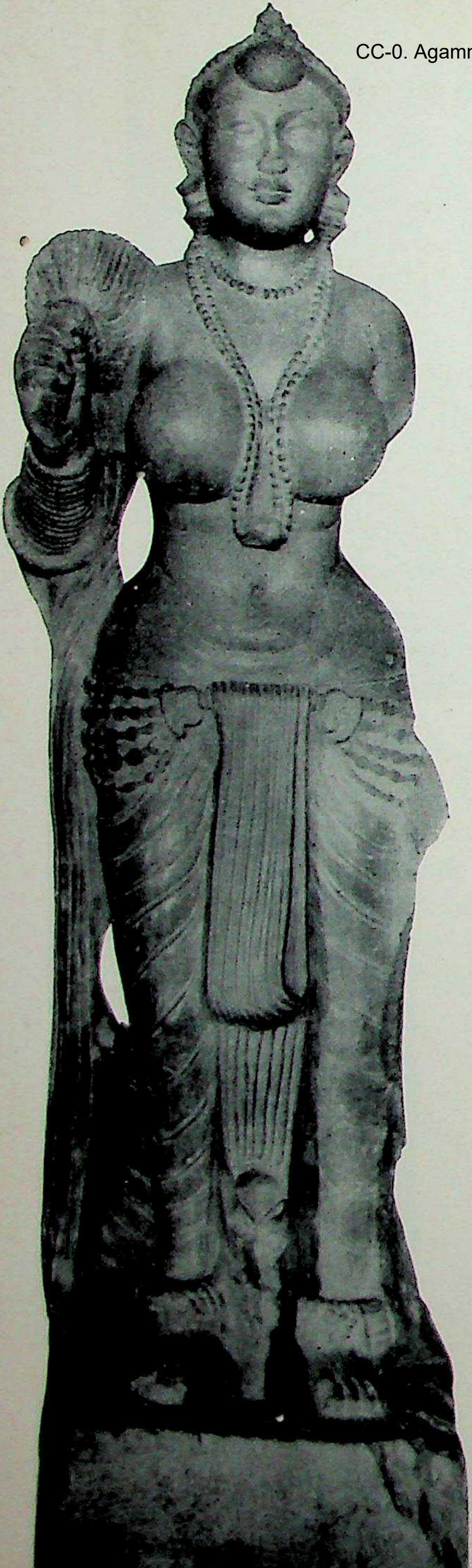


1A. Seal with figure of a bull from Mohenjo-Daro, 3000-2000 B.C.
National Museum of India, Delhi

1B. Bronze figurine of a dancing girl, Mohenjo-Daro, 3000-2000 B.C.

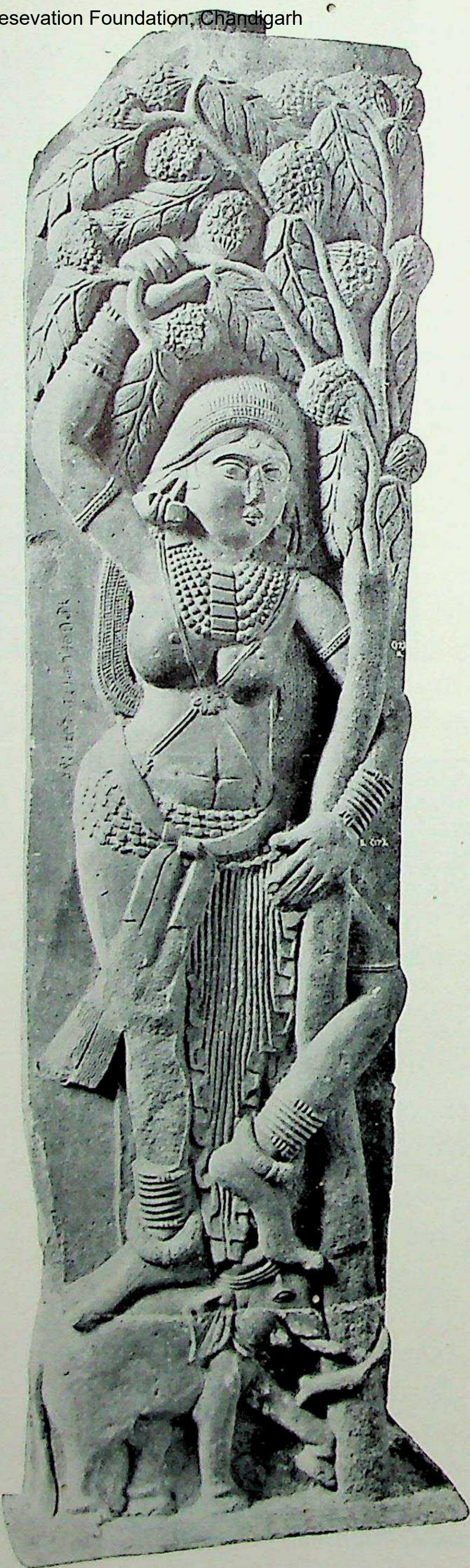


1C. Back view of a torso of a statuette of red stone from Harappa, 3000-2000 B.C.



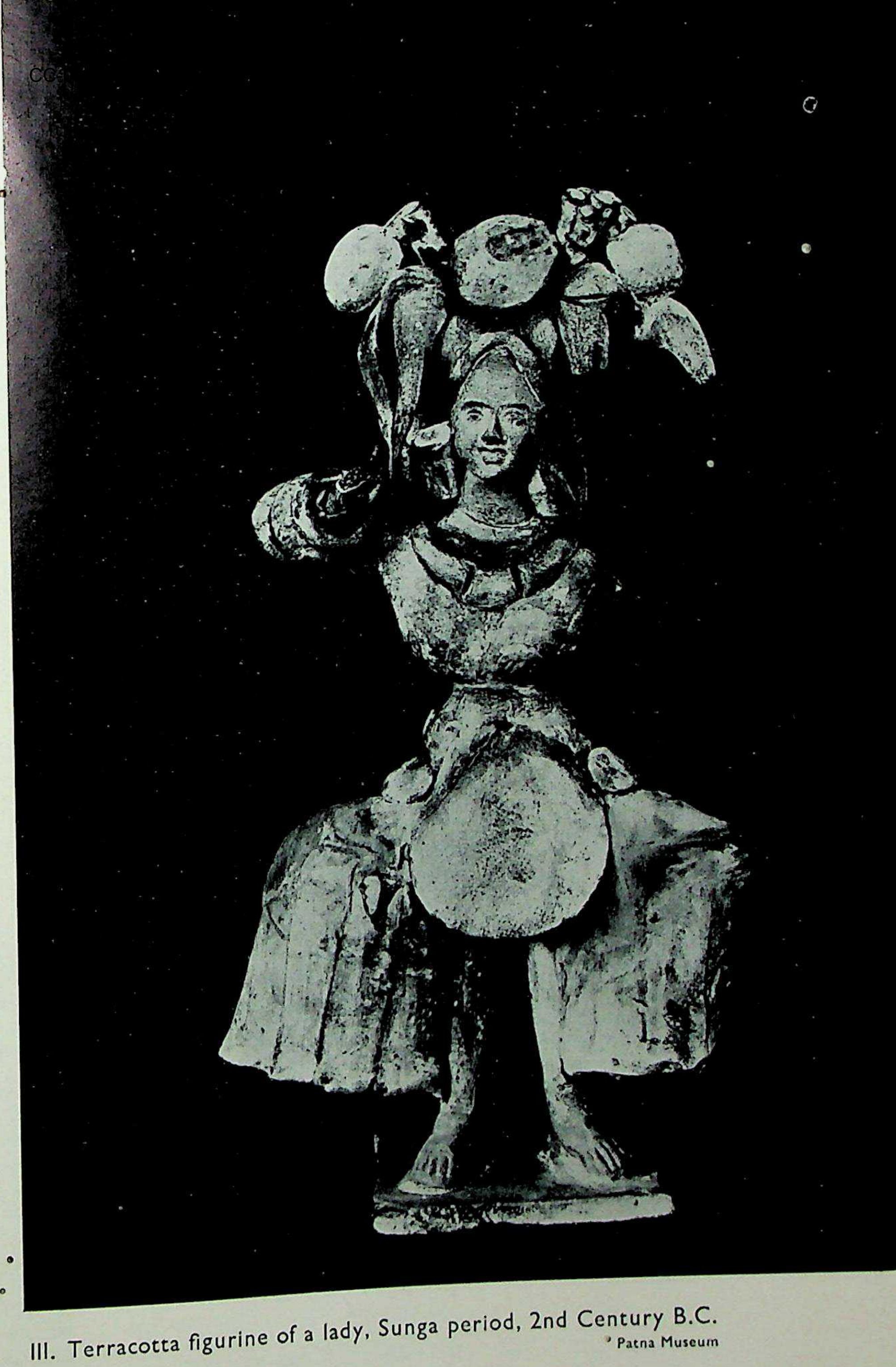
II A. Yakshi from Didarganj, Mauryan, 250 B.C.

Patna Museum



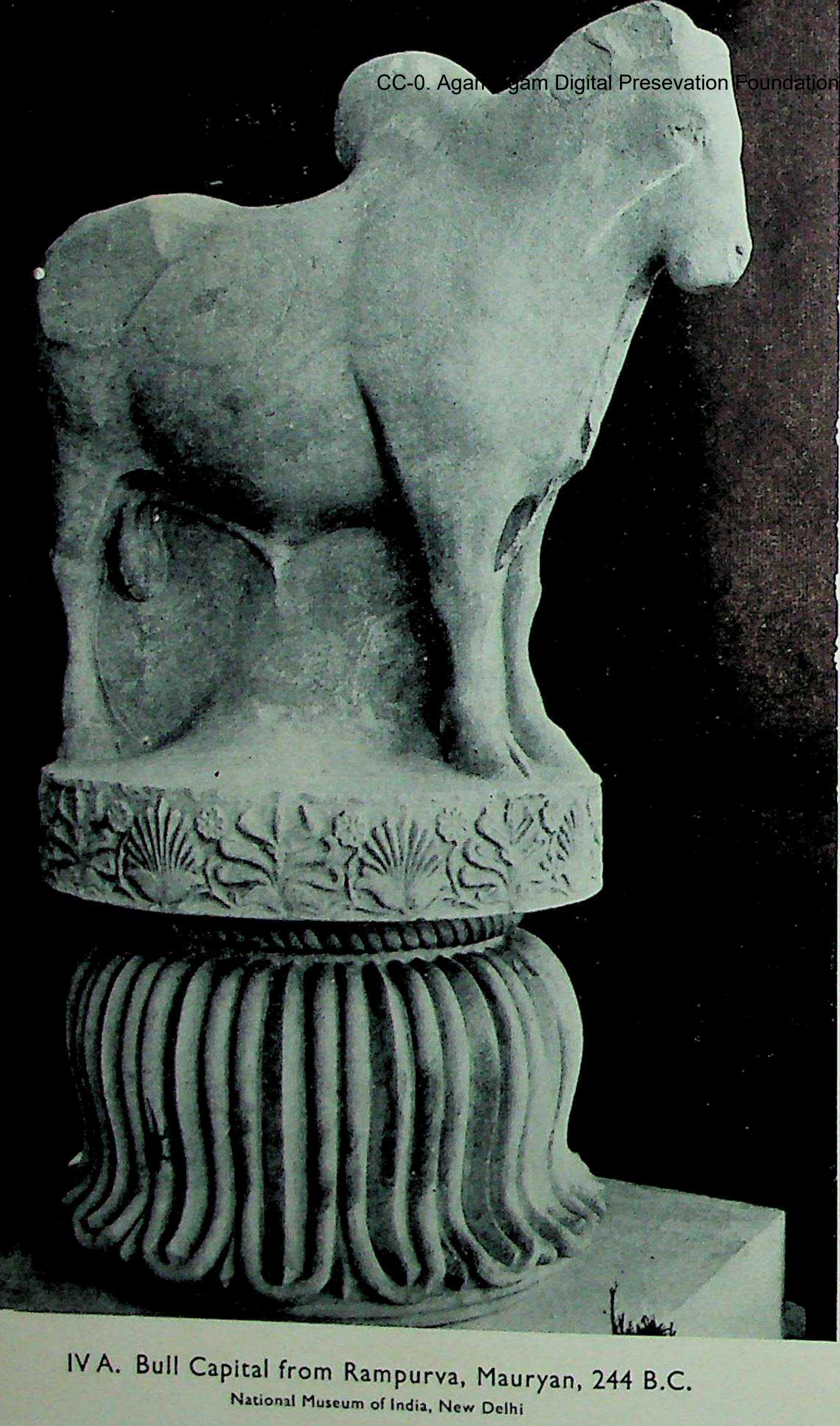
II B. Yakshi Chulakoka Devata from Bhārhut, 2nd Century B.C.

Indian Museum, Calcutta



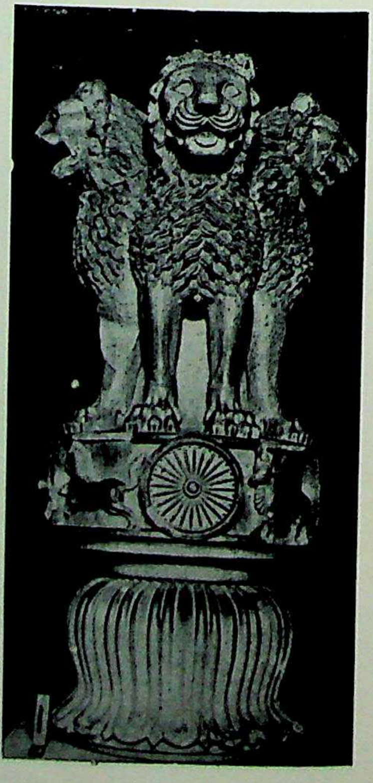
III. Terracotta figurine of a lady, Sunga period, 2nd Century B.C.

Patna Museum



IV A. Bull Capital from Rampurva, Mauryan, 244 B.C.

National Museum of India, New Delhi



IV B. Lion Capital from Sarnath, Mauryan, 250 B.C.

Sarnath Museum

State Museum
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2. The Language of Indian Art

SYMBOLS OF THE BUDDHA

INDIAN ART of the historical period is largely Buddhist in its early phase. The impact of Buddhism on Indian art was tremendous ; it stimulated art-expression to a height of achievement and glory that has seldom been surpassed in all its long story. A great many monuments arose in different parts of India such as at Bhārhut, Sanchi, Mathura, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Karla, Amaravati, Jagayyapeta, Nāgārjunikonda and Ajanta. These are amongst the finest achievements of this fertile creative phase of Indian art. Not only that; wherever Buddhism spread outside India, as in Burma, Siam, Indo-China, China, Japan, Central Asia, Tibet, Indonesia and Malaya, it acted as a powerful agency to implant Indian art traditions and to create superb monuments. The story of Indian cultural expansion into these lands is a long one and outside the scope of this work.

One singularly noticeable feature of early Buddhist art, whether at Bhārhut, Sanchi or Mathura, is the complete absence of the representation of the Buddha in human form. Not until five centuries after his passing away did the Buddha figure appear in Indian art. One may justifiably enquire why and how the Buddha figure was evolved at so late a date. One should look for the answer in the early attitude of Buddhism to art which was puritanic. It is said that the Buddha himself decreed against his portrayal. This ban on the portraiture of the Master gave rise to the use of symbols to represent him. It is believed that this method of representation of the Buddha was sanctioned by him. Devotion to the person of the Buddha was so marked even in his lifetime that the need arose to prescribe a symbol to represent him. Anxious disciples once requested the Master to prescribe some symbol that would be worthy of receiving the adoration of the devotees when he happened to be away. The Buddha then laid down that the Bodhi tree (it was while seated under the Bodhi tree in contemplation that he attained illumination) could properly represent him both in his lifetime and thereafter. Thus, the worship of the Bodhi tree became one of the chief rituals of the Buddhist religion.

The Bodhi tree, it would be relevant to state here, was by no means an exclusively Buddhist sacred symbol. In the *Bhagavad Gītā,* Lord Krishna proclaims, "of trees I am *asvattha*" (Bodhi, or tree of wisdom). This tree remains sacred to Hindus also.

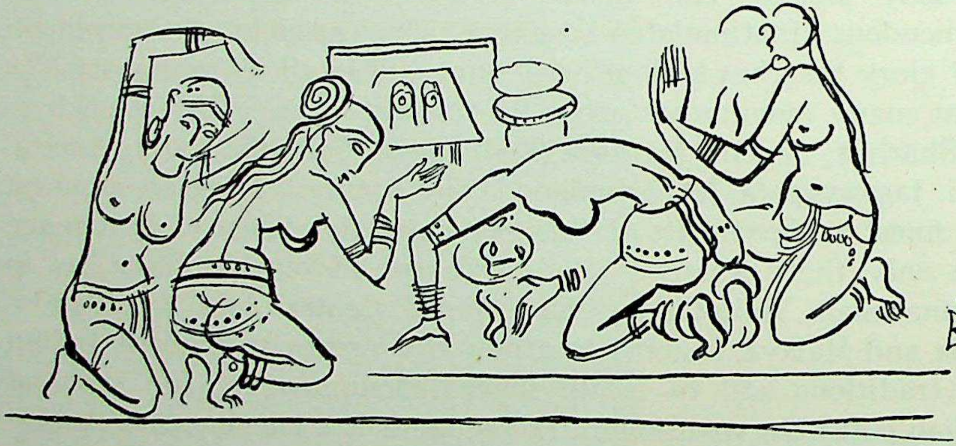

FIG. 1
Women worshipping the footprints of the Buddha—Amaravati

Other symbols soon followed, for the story of the Master's life had to be told.[6] His nativity and presence were indicated by footprints and lotus symbols (Fig. 1). It is said that when he was born, his first act was to take seven steps to proclaim his supremacy over the quarters and that at every step a miraculous lotus blossomed.

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[6] The principal events in the life of the Buddha are his descent from heaven in the form of a white elephant into the womb of Maya Devi, his nativity in the Sal grove, his flight from the palace at dead of night riding his favourite steed Kanthaka, accompanied by his faithful syce Channa, the assault of Mara to dislodge him from his seat under the Bodhi tree while in contemplation, the attainment of illumination, the preaching of the Doctrine in the Deer Park at Sarnath and his *parinirvana* or passing away.

The nativity of the Buddha was also suggested by a pair of elephants pouring water from jars held in their trunks over the seated or standing figure of a lady which is identified as that of Maya Devi, mother of the Buddha (Pl. V A, left, lower panel). This motif in art is more popularly known as Gaja-Lakshmi (Lakshmi with elephants). In Brahminical art, the figure of the lady in this motif is identified as Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance and the spouse of Vishnu. Originally, this figure was meant to represent the ancient Mother Goddess, a fertility divinity. The elephants, it may be recalled, symbolise the rain-bearing clouds and since fertility and water have intimate associations, this symbol is perfectly intelligible. Another motif often met with which suggests the same idea is the *poornaghata*[7] which is a water-pot containing sprays of lotuses (Pl. V A, left and right panels).

The presence of the Buddha was also indicated by representing a vacant throne. The Buddha's flight from his palace at dead of night, in quest of peace and the Law, was represented by showing his horse Kanthaka riderless. The horse was led by Channa, the faithful syce, but its hoofs were reverently borne on the palms of Indra and other gods lest the sound of the speeding animal should awaken the palace guards. In preaching the doctrine, the Buddha was only setting in motion once again the Wheel of the Law and this important activity is indicated by the symbol of the Dharma Chakra (Wheel of the Law—Pl. IV B). The Buddha first preached the Doctrine at the Deer Park at Sarnath. This great event is suggested by the addition of the figures of a pair of deer to the base of the Wheel.

It would be useful to remember that both the footprint and the Wheel are ancient Indian symbols and by no means exclusively Buddhist. Footprints symbolise Brahminical deities too, particularly Vishnu who as Trivikrama covered the entire universe in three steps (Pl. XXIV). This legend has a solar association suggesting the three stages of the sun's progress across the sky, at dawn, midday and at sunset. So, too, the Wheel is associated with the Sun-God (who was ultimately absorbed in the conception of Vishnu) and appears as an emblem of power held in one of the hands of Vishnu.

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[7] The *poornaghata* is a symbol of abundance. This appears in Jain as well as in Hindu art and also in ritual worship.

The *parinirvana*, or the passing away of the Buddha, was symbolised by the *stupa* or funeral mound. The *stupa*, since it enshrined the relics or the corporeal remains of the Buddha,[8] became an object of worship, and because it was very sacred it had to be distinguished from other funeral mounds. The Buddha was regarded not only as a spiritual leader but also as a *chakravartin* (emperor). What could signify his sovereignty better than the umbrella, a symbol the significance of which was universally understood in India from ancient times? Just as an umbrella gives protection from sun and rain, the king affords protection to his subjects; so, the umbrella has figured as a symbol of Indian royalty from olden days. The umbrella was superimposed on the mound to proclaim the Master's sovereignty. Since that was greater than that of any earthly king's several umbrellas came to be superimposed on the *stupa* to represent his universal sovereignty. The whole of Buddhism is composed of a trinity made up of the Buddha, *Dharma* (the Law) and the *Sangha* (the monastic order). This conception was embodied in the *tri-ratna* (three-jewel) symbol[9] (Pl. V A, crowning the vertical panels).

The *stupa*, in course of time, was transformed into an elaborate structure as at Sanchi and Amaravati with railings and gateways, called *toranas*, all profusely decorated with sculptured figures and other carvings. Fascinating architectural types such as the pagodas of Burma, the dagobas of Ceylon and the Buddhist shrines of Java and Siam were evolved out of the original hemispherical funeral mound which was superimposed with umbrellas.

It is important to remember that in employing symbols like the tree, the footprint, the wheel and the *stupa*, Indian art was not using abstract, unintelligible emblems that needed explanation. They had grown directly out of the life of the people and their ancient customs, and their significance as symbols was well understood.

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[8] "...the relics deposited in a stupa were called its 'life' (jivita), the stupa being, like the Christian altar and the church, at once the embodiment and the tomb of the dying god."—Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Nature of Buddhist Art.*

[9] In its origin the Buddhist Tri-ratna is related to the trident of Shiva and its symbolism, originally, it seems, is not Aryan.—Pierre Dupont, *The Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. IV, No. 2, Dec. 1936.

It is interesting to note that Buddhism which at first did not take kindly to art was obliged to change its attitude soon, for a great proselytizing and missionary faith like Buddhism, which covered large multitudes, could not long remain unmindful of the powerful agency of art to spread the light of the faith. Art was a language well understood by the people and the urge of the times for artistic expression was extraordinarily vital as exemplified by the monuments at Bhārhut, Sanchi and Mathura. So Buddhism was obliged to shed its hedonistic view of art and artists and employed both in an ever-increasing measure for its propagation. Another factor that facilitated the increasing use of art was the internal revolution which took place within Buddhism itself. This split it into two schools known as the *Hīnayāna* (Lesser Vehicle) which professed to embody the original doctrine of the Buddha in all its purity and the *Mahāyāna* (Greater Vehicle) which developed into an expansive cult. This occurred about the 1st century A.D. As against the severely austere faith preached by the Buddha, the *Mahāyāna* developed an elaborate mythology and a great pantheon consisting of several Bodhisattvas (beings destined to become Buddhas) and their *Saktis* or female consorts. The historical Buddha was distinguished from the Ādi-Buddha and the Dhyāni Buddhas. He was clearly deified and appeared in this great pantheon as a supreme god. What is seen in Mahāyānism is a development akin to popular Hinduism. The mythologising tendency of Buddhism furnished admirable material for artistic presentation through stone and paint.

THE BUDDHA FIGURE

The Buddha, as has already been noticed, came to occupy more and more the position of a god in popular imagination evoking a passionate devotion to his person that could hardly be satisfied with abstract symbols. The figure of the Buddha therefore appeared in Indian art. This happened nearly five centuries after he had passed away. One may well ask what was the material or model from which his likeness was created? The first thing to remember in this connection is that the Buddha was no longer regarded as an individual who appeared at a definite point of time in history and then disappeared as any other mortal. What is dealt with is the Universal One or rather the Buddhahood, which is eternal. The Buddha is the *Mahā-Purusha* (Great Person) or Superman, endowed with

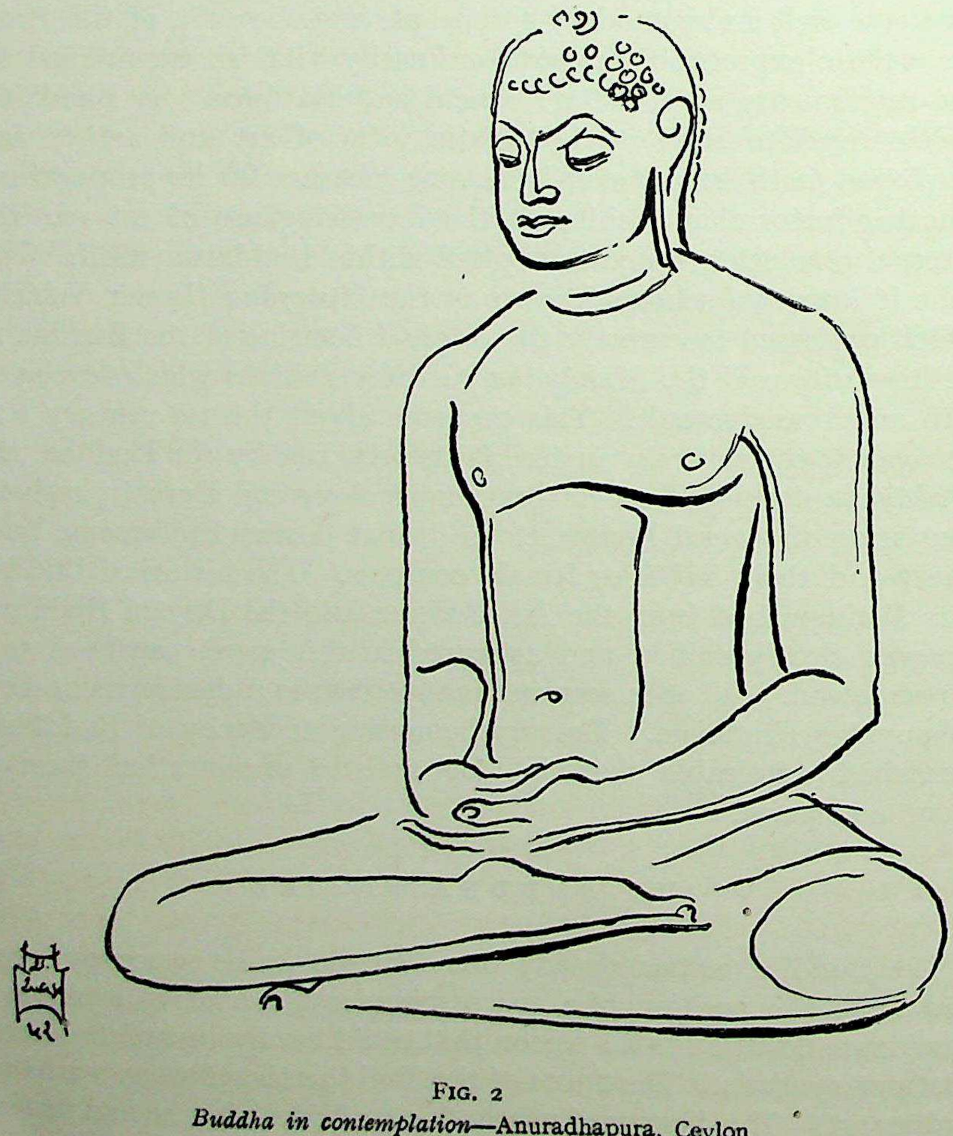

FIG. 2
Buddha in contemplation—Anuradhapura, Ceylon

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many distinguishing features. He has 32 major signs and 80 minor signs. In short, his form was conceived in the same way as that of Siva or of Vishnu whose forms are imagined according to certain defined formulae. It is an evocation. The model for the seated Buddha figure with which the world is familiar today is obviously the Indian yogi seated in contemplation under a tree. A yogi is one who has attained the realization of truth. He is beyond good and evil. The yogi is undoubtedly the most challenging and arresting figure in the cultural story of India.

The significance of the usual posture in which we find the seated Buddha figure is that it is the posture of contemplation where the senses are completely controlled (Fig. 2). The eyes are closed. The hands rest on the lap, and the palms are laid one over the other. This position of the hands is known as the *dhyāna mudra*, the gesture of contemplation. The seat is firm and the legs are crossed showing the soles up. This posture is called *vajrāsana* (the adamantine seat). The body is erect and unshakable and the bearing is calm, unruffled and majestic. The figure is like "a lamp in a windless place that does not flicker".

Where the right hand of the seated Buddha figure points downward it is in the *bhūmi-sparsa mudra* or earth-touching gesture (Fig. 3). This gesture gives to the figure a new significance and has its own separate story to communicate. Māra, the Evil One (the Buddhist Satan), was bent upon preventing the Buddha from attaining enlightenment which would open the path of salvation to millions. All his temptations with promises of unlimited worldly powers, pleasure and wealth having totally failed to deflect the Buddha from his resolute determination, Māra and his hosts made a vehement assault to dislodge the Buddha from his contemplation, and challenged his right to occupy the seat under the Bodhi tree. Thereupon the Buddha, pointing towards the earth, called upon it to bear witness to his right to occupy the seat by virtue of the merits he had gained in his previous births. The Earth-Goddess responded instantaneously and Māra and his hosts fled. Thus this gesture indicates the triumph of the Buddha over Evil and his unflinching determination to attain enlightenment in order to open the path of salvation to suffering humanity.

Another notable event in the life of the Buddha and the history of Buddhism is the preaching of the doctrine. The first preaching took place at the Deer Park at Sarnath. The Buddha henceforward is the Great Teacher, the one who leads others along the Path. He is therefore often represented in the act of expounding the doctrine. The hands are in the *dharma-chakra mudra* (Fig. 4) or in the position of setting the Wheel of the Law in motion. Another familiar hand gesture in which the right hand is bent at the elbow and is held out with the open palm facing the spectator is the *abhaya mudra*, which means "fear not", and is a sign consoling, encouraging and giving hope to the weary and the afflicted (Fig. 5). It conveys to all the infinite compassion of the Buddha and his calm assurance.

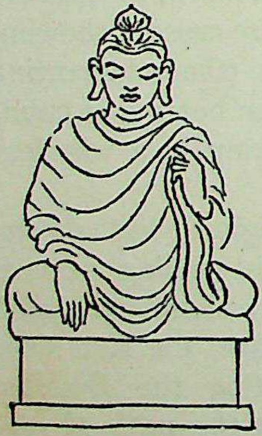


FIG. 3

Bhūmi-sparsa mudra

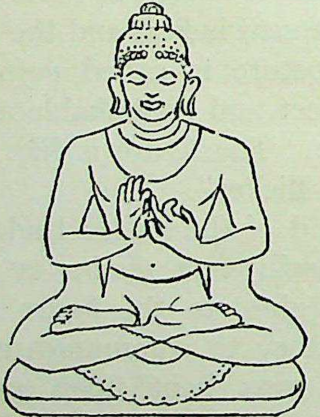


FIG. 4

Dharma-chakra mudra

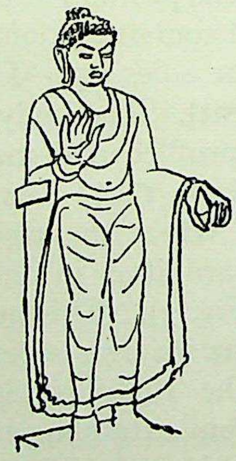
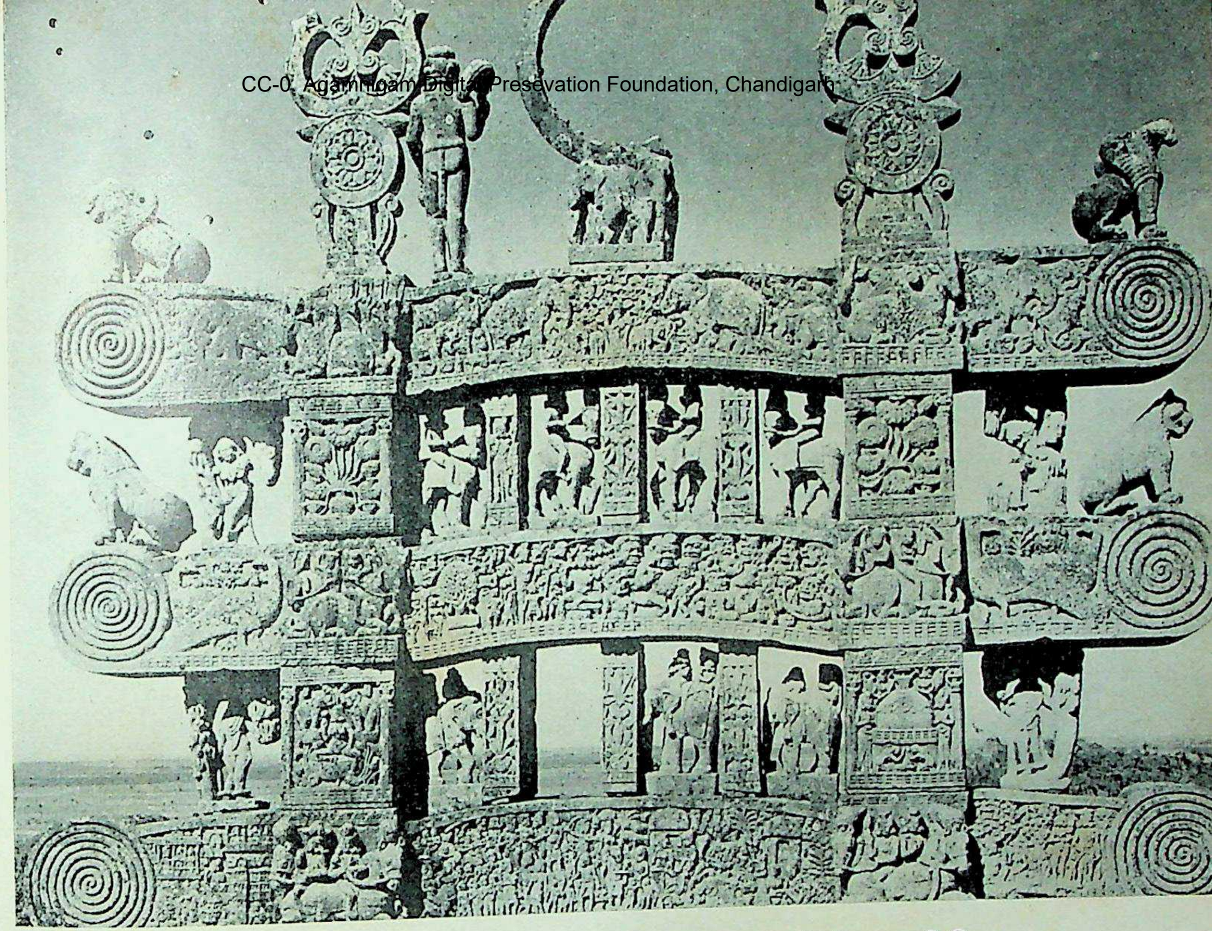


FIG. 5

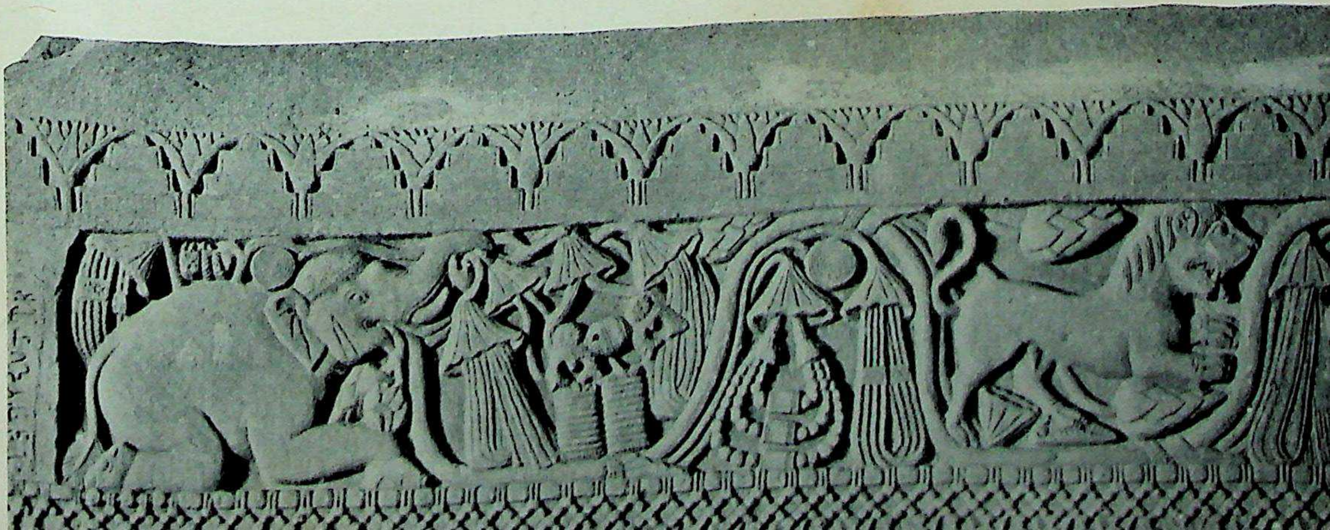
Abhaya mudra

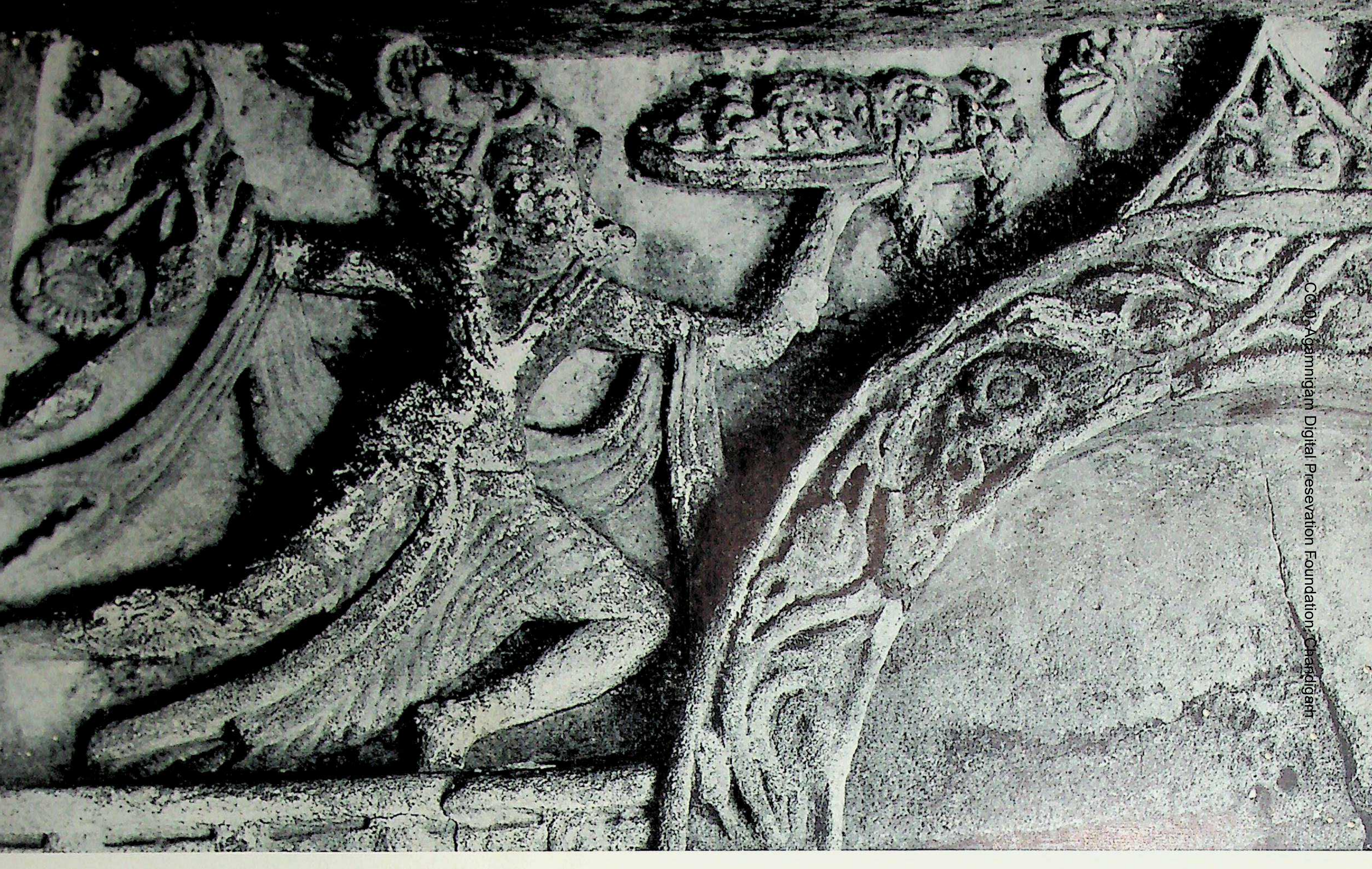
There are several other marks of significance in the Buddha figures. The halo around the head hardly requires any explanation being a symbol in universal use. The Buddha's feet usually rest on a lotus pedestal. The lotus stands for purity and also suggests a supernatural or miraculous origin. The Buddha figure is found seated either on a lotus throne or on a lion-throne (*simhāsana*). The lion is the king of beasts and is associated with royal and heroic virtues. The *simhāsana* is therefore a symbol of royalty befitting the *Chakravartin* (the King of kings) that the Buddha is. Among the 32 major marks



V A. North Gateway of Sanchi Stupa, 2nd Century B.C.

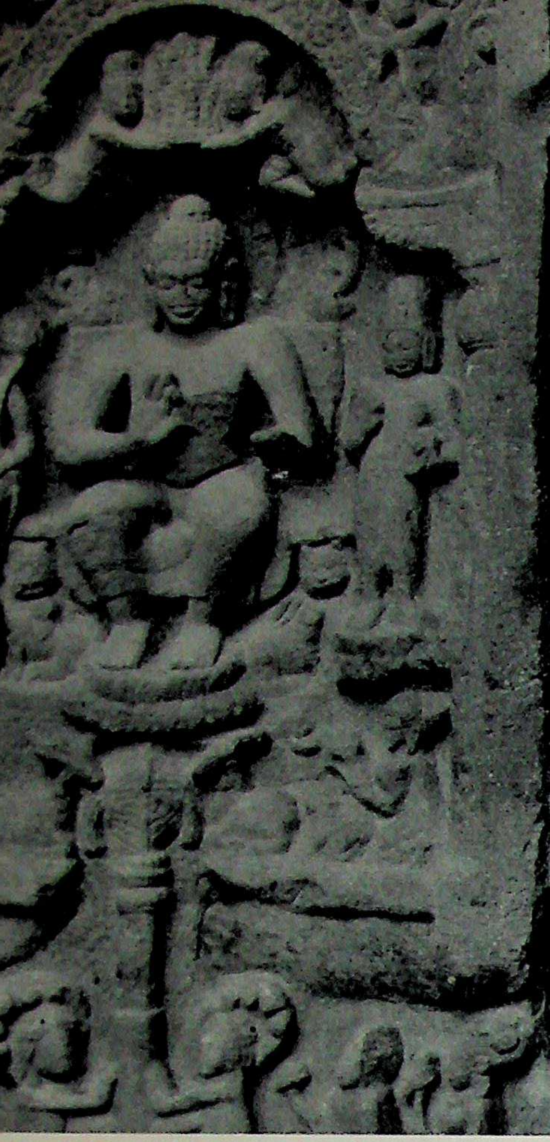
V B. Kalpavalli on a coping stone from Bhārhut, 2nd Century B.C.



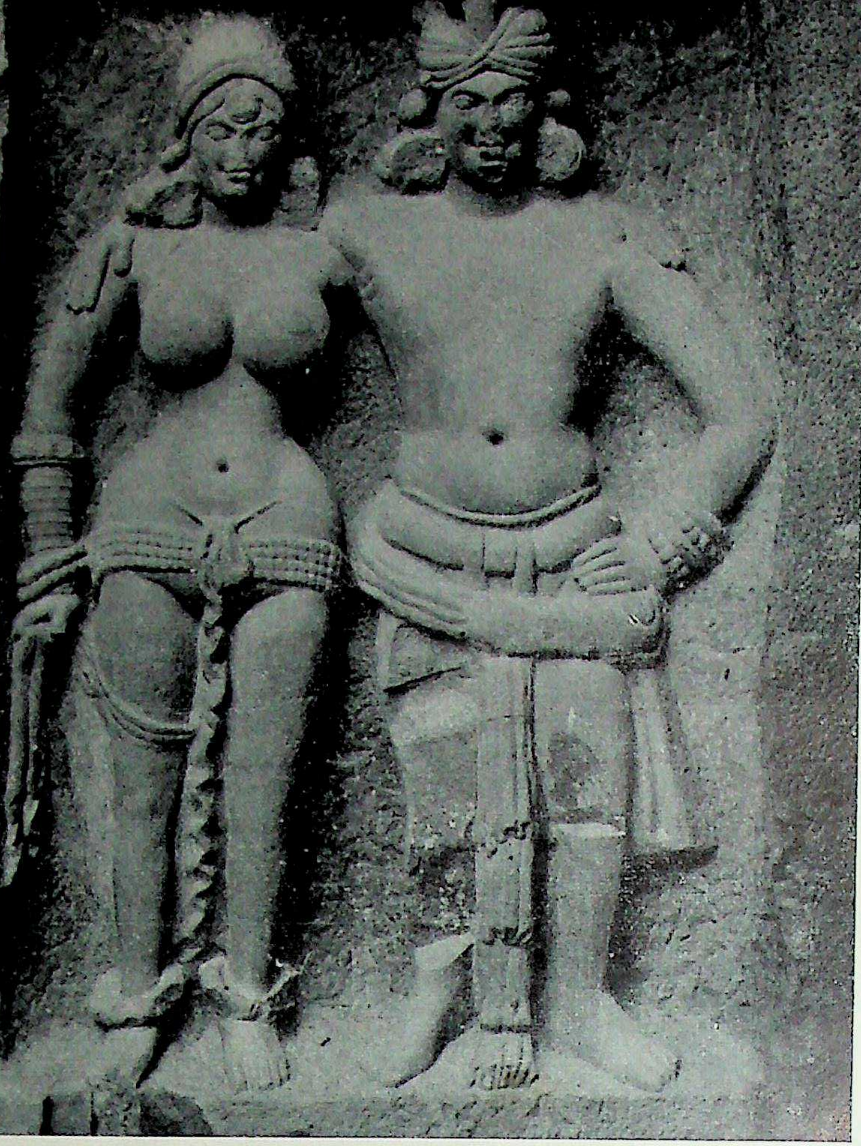


VI. Flying Vidyadharas from Rani Gumpha Cave, Udayagiri (Orissa), 100 B.C.

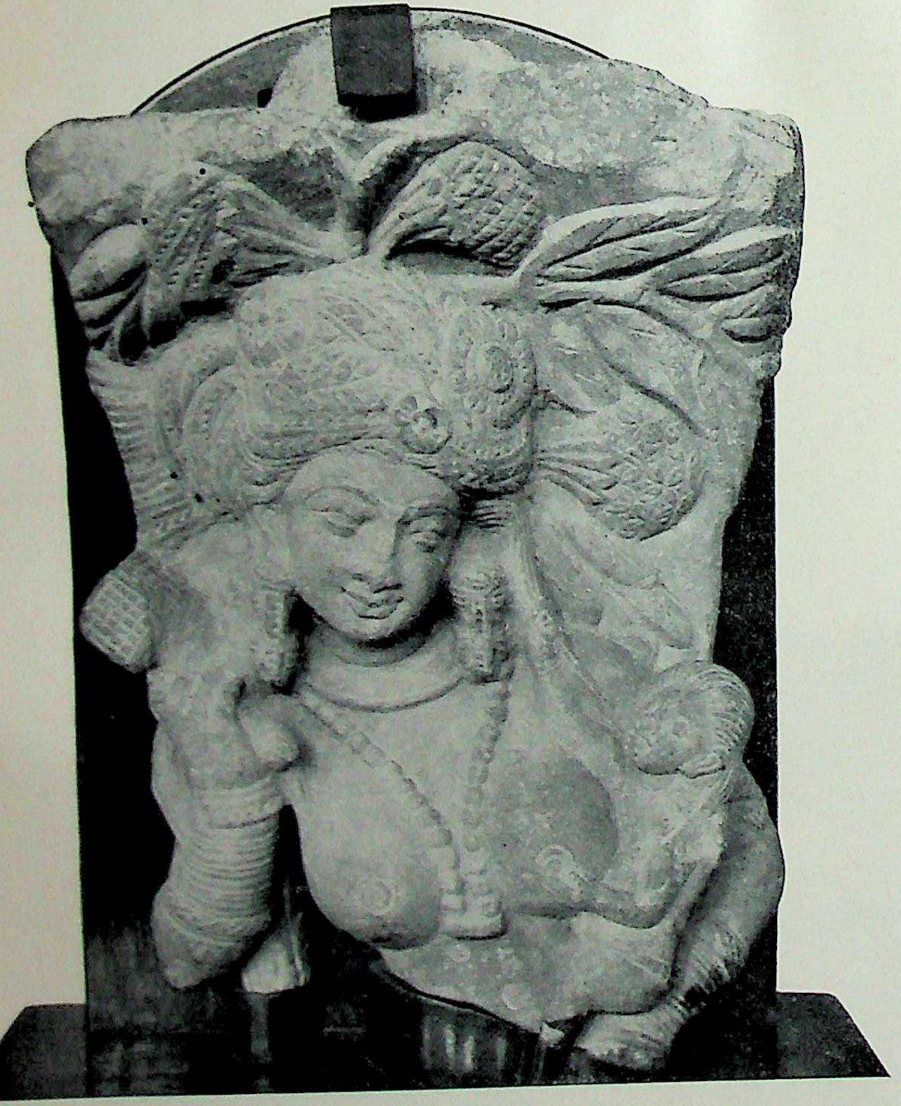
VII. Interior view of Chaitya Hall, Karla, 1st Century A.D.



IIA. The Buddha preaching, Karla, 6th Century A.D.

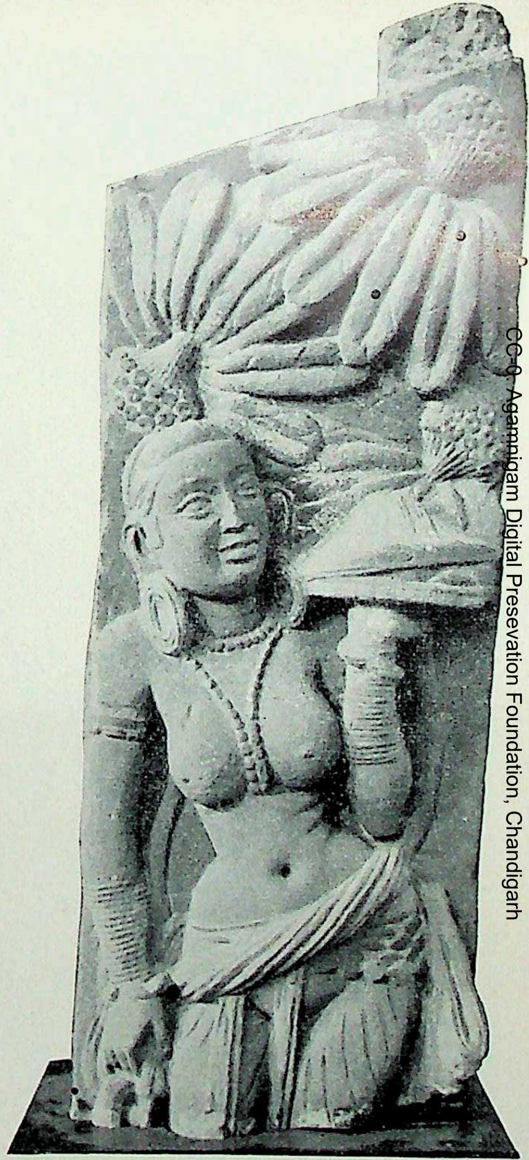


VIII B. Donor couple from Karla, 1st Century A.D.

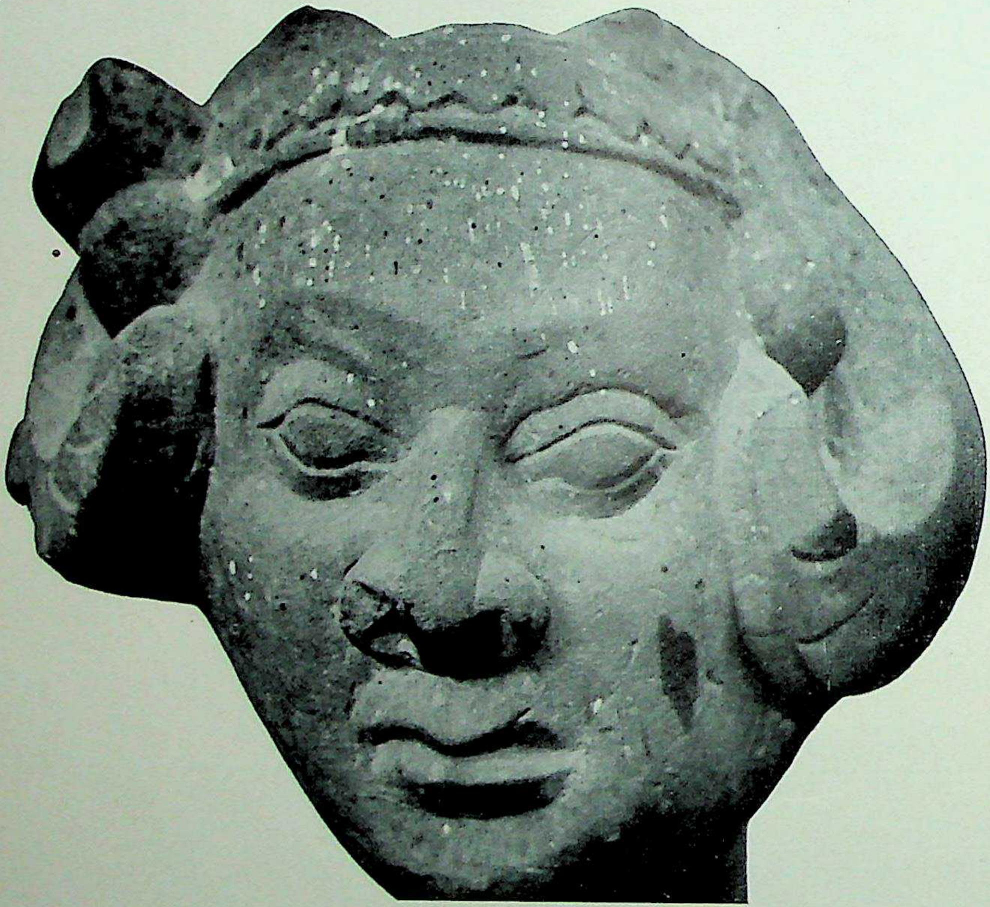


IX A. Mother and Child from Mathura, 2nd Century A.D.

Mathura Museum



IX B. Yakshi from Mathura, 2nd Century A.D.



X. Portrait Head from Mathura,
2nd Century A.D.
Mathura Museum

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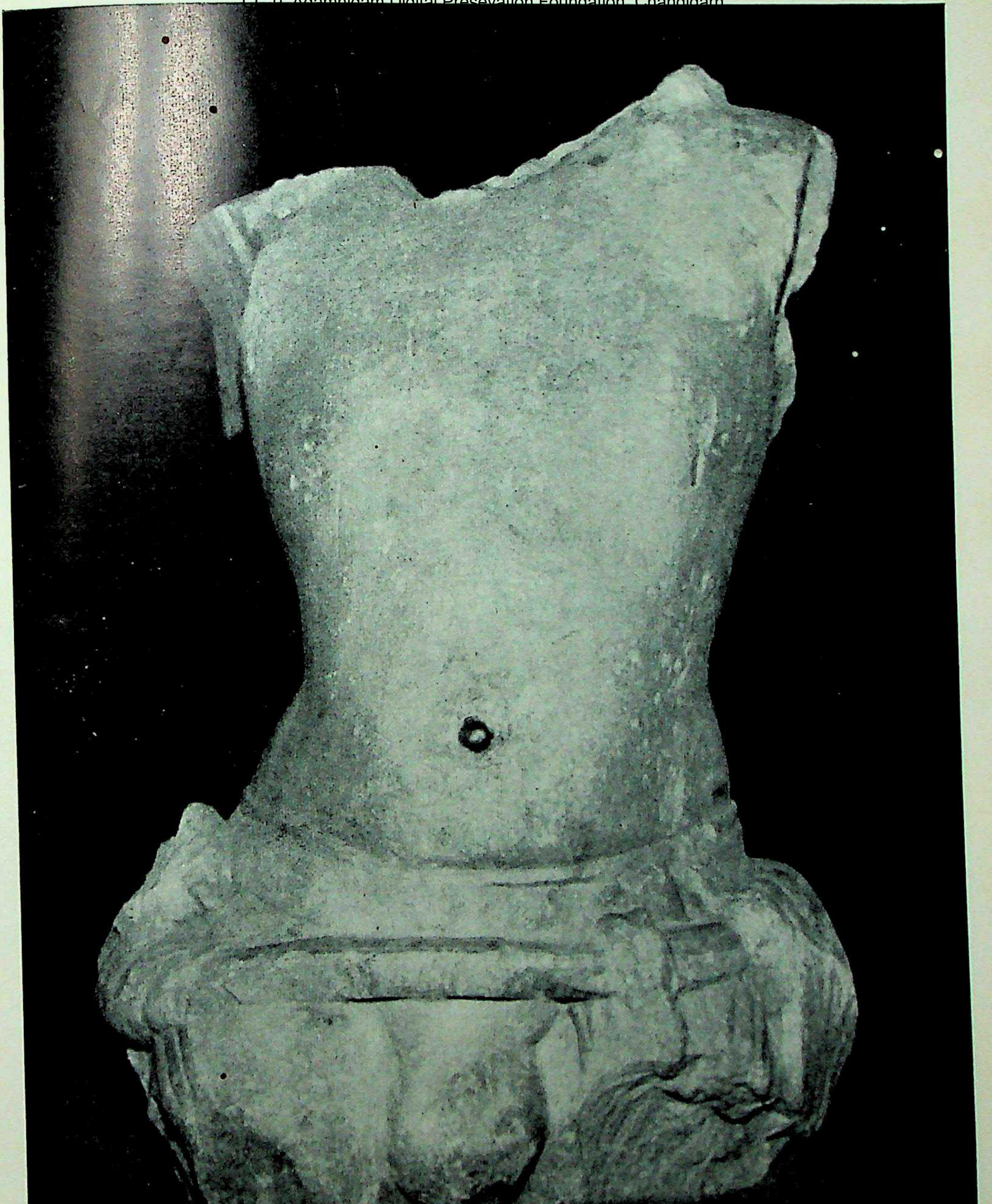
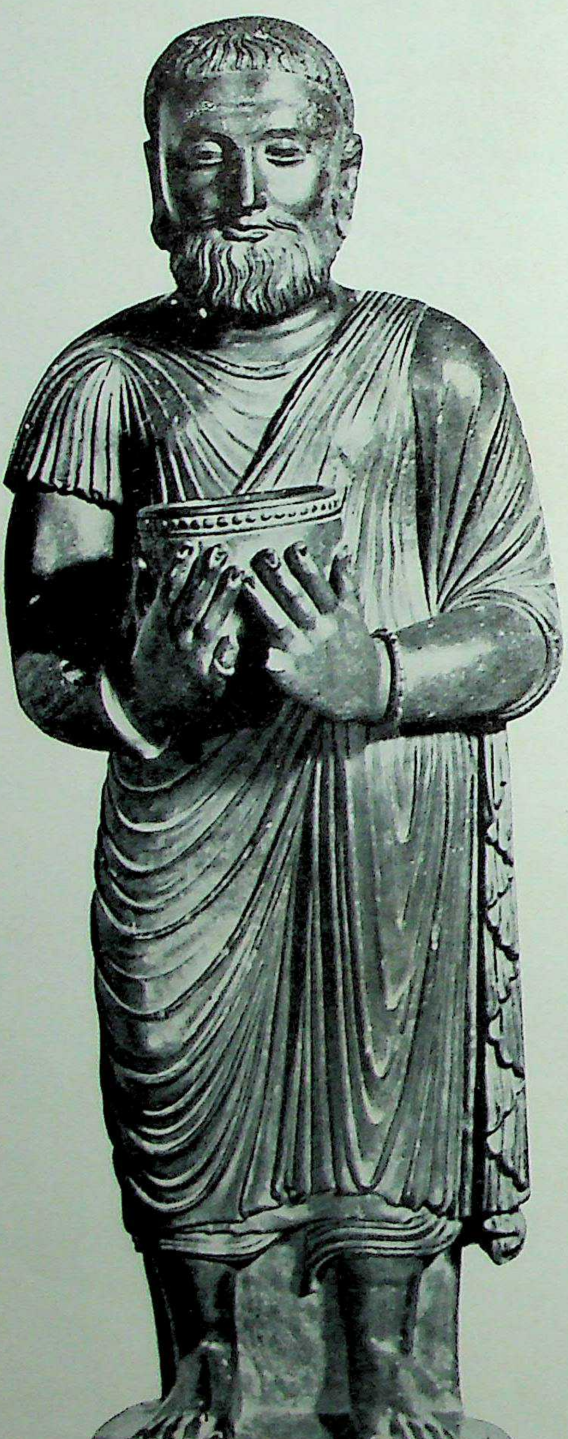


XI. Torso from Nagaram Village, Nalgonda Dist., 2nd Century A.D.

Hyderabad Museum



XII. Friar Bala, Gandharan,
3rd Century A.D.

National Museum of India

of a *Mahā-Purusha* (Great Person) the most important are the *usnīsa* and the *ūrna*. The *usnīsa* appears as a slight bump on the top of the head. This protuberance is an extension of the body of the Buddha; the significance of this is that the normal bodily limit is exceeded, thereby indicating that the Buddha exceeds all limits and is beyond them.[10] More prominently seen is the *ūrna* which is a hairy mark between the eyebrows occupying the same position as the third eye of Siva. According to legend it flashes forth a light which illumines the universe and symbolises the great spiritual powers of the Buddha.

Though a monk, the Buddha is rarely shown with shaven head. The head is shown as covered with curls. The hair, as is well known from the story of Samson, indicates strength. The Buddha legend says that Sakya Muni,[11] before he became the Buddha, on meeting Dipānkara Buddha, the earliest of his 24 predecessors, spread his hair for Dipānkara to walk on, and all the powers of Dipānkara were transmitted to him.

The Buddha power is rolled into innumerable curls. These curls on the Buddha head turn to the right, indicating the path of the sun and the path of life (Pl. XIII). The curl itself is a symbol of eternity as its circular shape implies that it has no beginning and no end.

The frame of the Buddha is described as "divinely straight", "without stoop" and "towering up symmetrically". These conceptions are invariably expressed in the Buddha figures (Pl. XV). The body of the Master is shown as smooth, shiny and perpetually youthful, and as the vehicle of a dynamic inner power. It is shown to be calm and self-possessed and all-knowing or all-hearing as the enlarged ears symbolise. The seated Buddha figure is pure monumental art and the most eloquent expression of the idea of Being. It embodies all the peace that is Buddhism. The image of the

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[10] Stella Kramrisch, "Emblems of the Universal Being", *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. III, No. 2, December 1935.

[11] The historical person who became the Buddha was Prince Siddhartha of the Gautama family, also known as Gautama. As his family belonged to the Sakya clan he was referred to as Sakya Muni or the ascetic belonging to the Sakya clan. The three names are used in Indian literature to designate the man who became the Buddha.

Buddha that was created and which replaced the symbols was a purely conceptual one and was itself marked by symbols and these symbols transformed the image by their deep significance.[12]

GESTURES, POSTURES AND OTHER ATTRIBUTES

Gestures, postures and attributes are not only very characteristic features of Indian works of art but they are also significant conventions designed to convey specific meanings and enhance the content of a given form.

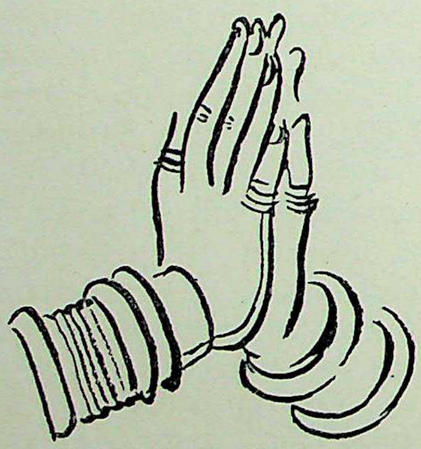

FIG. 6
Anjali mudra

The important role that *mudras* play in investing form with meaning was noticed in describing the figure of the Buddha. The efficacy of gesture to communicate intensity of feeling and thought in a way that words cannot do has been recognised in India from a remote past. The use of *mudras* as a definite sign language had come into existence long before the days of the Buddha (6th century B.C.). It is said that the Buddha himself was proficient in this art. The language of *mudras* was one amongst the several arts, proficiency in which was required of a person considered really educated in ancient India. *Mudras* have also been known as *divya-kriya* (divine actions) meaning thereby that they constitute the language of the gods. Some of the *mudras* are traced to certain significant actions of the gods; it was noticed earlier that the *bhūmi-sparsa* is associated with the action of the Buddha. The *mudras* had a two-fold development; one in association with religion as seen in the images and used in the rituals and the other as employed on the stage. In Hindu and Buddhist forms of worship the *mudras* function as outward physical symbols of *mantras* or magical formulae. It is believed that *mudras* impart great potency to *mantras*. Amongst the *mudras* commonly employed in images, mention has already been made of the *dhyāna*, *dharma-chakra*, *abhaya* and the *bhūmi-sparsa*. In most of the figures of the deities, the *abhaya* is employed as a telling gesture of assurance and protection and the *varada mudra* to convey the promise of gift or fulfilment of the wishes of the devotees (Pl. XXIII, lower left). The hands, when in the *vitarka mudra* (*vyākhyāna* or *chin mudra*), indicate the act of teaching or exposition (Fig. 9). Praying figures assume the *anjali mudra* which is also a Christian symbol (Fig. 6). The *katakāmukha* and the *kartarīmukha mudras* frequently occur in the images of deities holding lotus flowers (Fig. 7). The *ardha-chandra* (half-moon) and the *gaja hasta* (hand resembling an elephant's trunk) are employed in the dancing figures of Siva (Fig. 8).

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[12] "The image is of One Awakened and for our awakening who are still asleep." —Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Nature of Buddhist Art.*

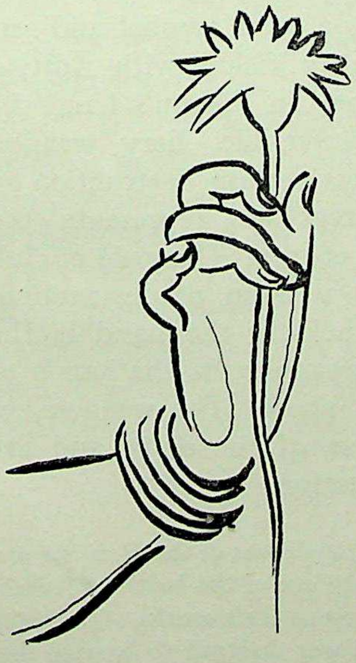

FIG. 7
Katakāmukha mudra

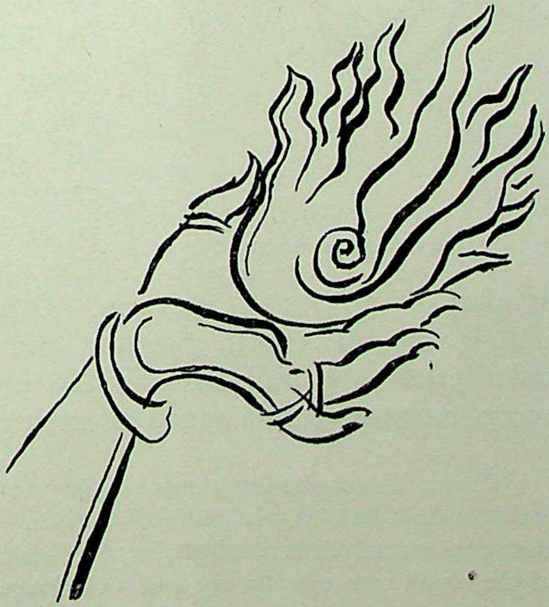

FIG. 8
Ardha-chandra mudra

The first one bears the flame and the other points towards the leg that crushes the demon (Pl. XXXVIII), signifying the sure destruction of evil and the promise of protection to the devotees. The *mudras* are like flowers of the flesh, as René Grousset has observed, and hold within their chalice the whole of human tenderness and thought. "Never indeed has the spiritual value of the hands been comprehended with such mystical insight as in Indian art."

Apart from displaying *mudras*, the hands of the deities carry certain attributes which are symbols of their power. For example, three of the four arms of Vishnu may hold the conch, the wheel and the club; the fourth hand may hold a lotus or it may assume the *varada* or *abhaya mudra*. The conch is the symbol of vibration and of creative force.[13] It is the trumpet of Vishnu. The wheel or discus is a solar symbol and serves to identify Vishnu with Āditya, the Sun-God. In Vishnu's hand the discus is a terrible, fiery weapon which brings certain destruction on all evil forces and represents the great solar energy. The *gadā* or club is another weapon of destruction. The lotus held in the hand is the symbol of the created universe. Other weapons in the hands of deities are the sword, the axe and the noose. The weapons of destruction are indicative of the prowess of the deity and are complementary to the hands assuring protection.

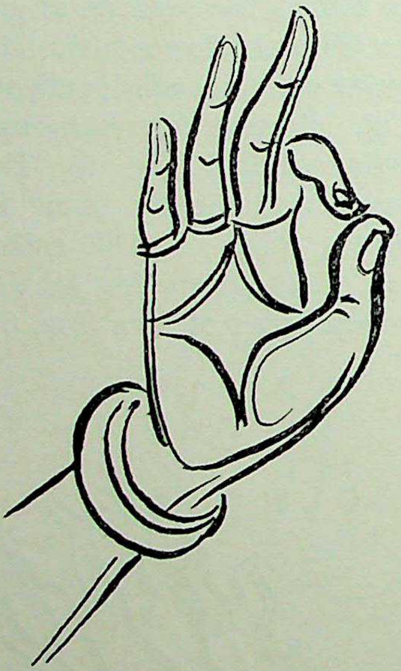

FIG. 9
Vyākhyāna mudra

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[13] The conch was also the trumpet of the great warrior-heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, each of whom had his own distinctive conch. On the eve of the battle of Kurukshetra the assembled heroes including Sri Krishna blew on their conchs. The boom of the conch was a battle cry and a challenge and was designed to hearten and rouse the assembled troops to action. The conch is sounded daily in Hindu temples as part of ritual worship and in Hindu homes on festive occasions.

VĀHANA

Another distinguishing feature of the figures of the deities is that they are very often shown as riding their particular *vāhanas*[14] or mounts. Kāli the goddess rides a tigress, suggestive of her destructive fury, while Siva rides the bull, symbolic of strength, virility and majesty. Indra, the Rain-god, rides the white elephant, Airāvata, which stands for the rain-bearing clouds; Kārtikeya, the commander of celestial hosts, rides a peacock that crushes a writhing snake to death in its cruel talons.

LOTUS MOTIF

The lotus motif is employed very frequently to act as a foot-rest or seat for the images. As has been said, its function here is to suggest divine origin and purity. The varying significations of the lotus symbol arose out of the association of the lotus with water, sun and the creation myth. As a water plant, it functions as an adequate symbol to suggest fertility or the life-giving powers of water and of creation. When the Supreme Being Nārāyana[15] (He of the moving waters) willed creation, a thousand-petalled golden lotus shot up from his navel on which appeared Brahma, charged with the duties of creation. From the pericarp of the flower the worlds issued. When a lotus rhizome issues out of the mouth of an elephant or a yaksha, it is not to be understood as a fantastic decorative motif, but as a symbol of fertility related to water cosmology (Pl. V B). The lotus is further a solar symbol because of its intimate association with the sun at whose rising the lotus expands and at whose setting it contracts and closes its petals.

BHANGA

In the language of Indian art, postures and rhythmic movement are employed as idioms to deepen the content and to enrich the meaning. In moments of tension, concentration or relaxation, the body naturally assumes certain postures. These postures have been stylized by convention to serve the ends of art. These postures and bends had become a notable feature of Indian art by the 2nd century A.D. It would be relevant to remember in this connection that Indian dancing had become a highly developed art by then and had deeply influenced Indian sculpture and painting. It was rightly held that a knowledge of dancing was essential for the artist. It is to this belief that Indian art owes its extraordinarily rhythmic quality, a quality that invests the figures with charm, liveliness and intimacy.

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[14] Mesopotamian deities like Assur ride animal mounts.

[15] Another name for Vishnu.

When a figure is in equilibrium, implying repose and a gracious mood, as in the standing images of the Buddha, it is said to be in the *samabhanga* pose (Fig. 5). Here, there is no inclination from the central plumb line. If the image is slightly bent with its weight thrown on one side indicating a sportive or reflective attitude, it is said to be in the *abhanga* pose. When the figure is bent three times with the head inclined away from the trunk, and the lower part of the body taking a turn in the reverse direction, it is in the *tribhanga* pose (Fig. 10). The *atibhanga* or much-bent pose appears in figures in violent action as in the fighting and slaying images of Kāli or Durga and in the figure of the dancing Siva. The bends are thus indicative of certain animating passions. In addition, as pointed out by Stella Kramrisch, the bends are means to make figures flexible, to give them a sense of movement and to present them in fresh angles of perspective. The bold, sweeping curves created by the *bhangas* proceed beyond the physical limits of the figures. They are a means of

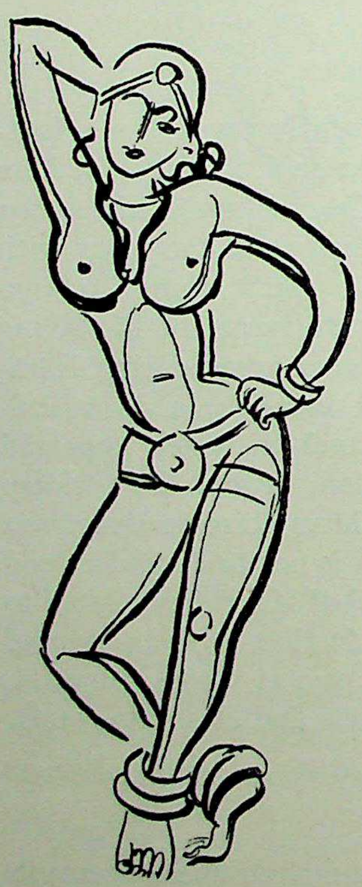

FIG. 10
Figure of a woman in the Tribhanga pose

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escape from the limitations of the body in order to reflect the soul. The *abhanga* and *tribhanga* postures, it will be noticed, add to the female figures a sense of charming languor and sensuous grace.

GUNA

Form in Indian art is also determined by another factor known as *guna* or character or quality. Broadly speaking, images of deities are classified according to the *gunas* as *sātvik*, *rājasik* and *tāmasik*. A figure as that of Brahma seated in contemplation or the Buddha in *samadhi* is *sātvik*. Such a figure is the symbol of poise, of absolute calm and of the supremacy of the mind over matter. It is a pure spiritual category. A *rājasik* image conveys a sense of splendour and might. It assumes a bearing befitting a ruler of the worlds and preserver of order and is adorned with precious ornaments (of which the resplendent *kirita* or headgear is a noticeable one) and holds varied weapons in its arms. Such a figure may also be borne on a vehicle or on a lotus. A *tāmasik* image is that of a deity in its destructive aspect. Usually many-armed, bearing weapons, and terrible to behold, it is depicted as fighting and slaying demoniac forces.

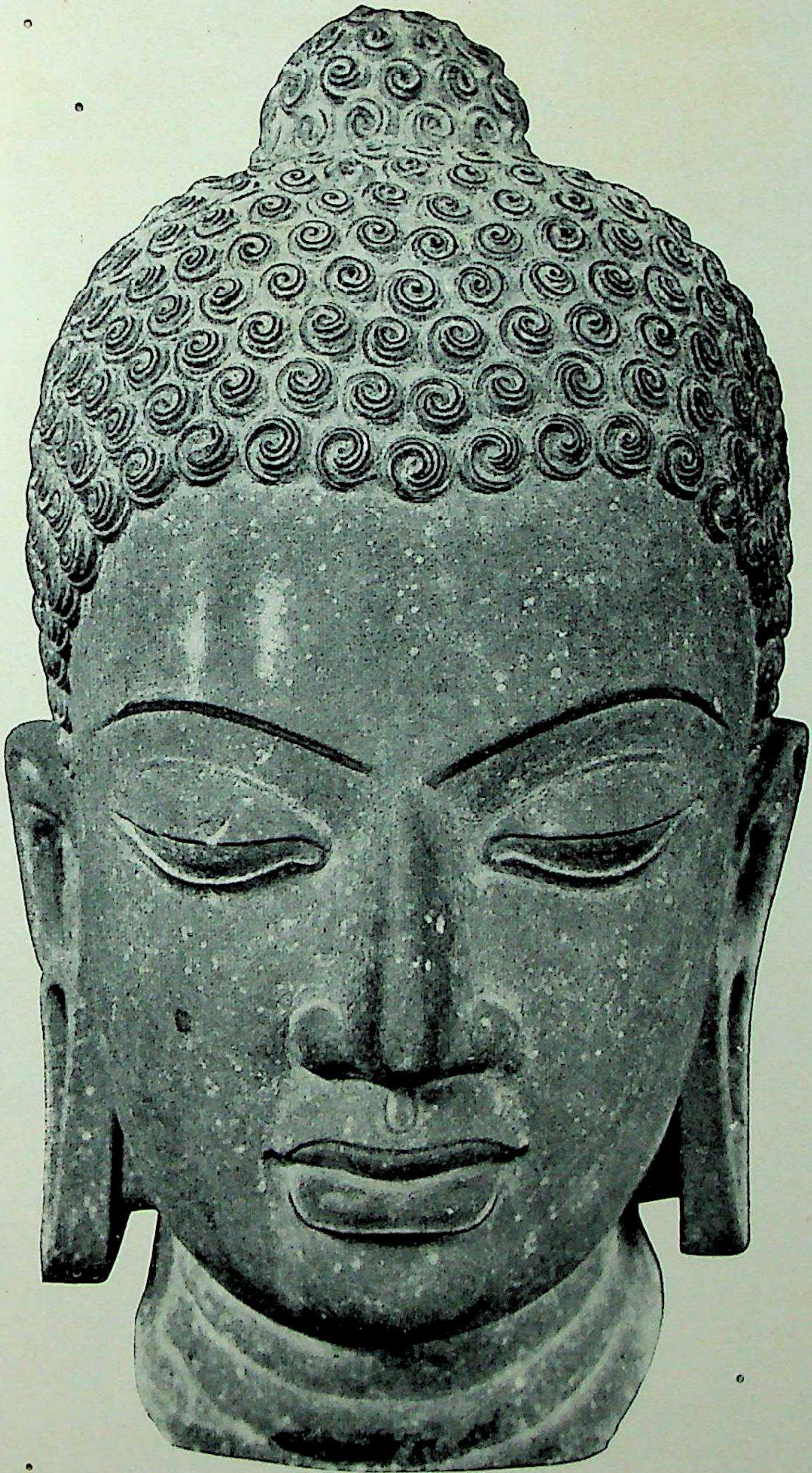
OTHER CONVENTIONS

Other important conventions, which affected the method of expression, were also evolved. All Indian images except those placed in niches for worship can mostly be regarded as part of architecture. Thus in Indian art, sculpture and architecture have always remained vitally interrelated. Naturally, each one of these has conditioned the expression of the other, and sometimes as in the case of the Kailasa temple at Ellora the architecture is scarcely distinguishable from the sculpture as it is carved out of a huge rock (Pl. xxx). It will be noticed that relief sculpture has been favoured by Indian artists in spite of their skill to do sculpture in the round. It is because this suited the needs of Indian art. All available space in a shrine had to be utilized—wall surfaces, pillars, niches and towers—to glorify the faith and to relate its great legends. In Buddhist shrines incidents from the *Jātakas* (the birth stories connected with the several previous lives of the Buddha) were told for the edification of the faithful. Insistent repetition of certain events, such as the enlightenment and the preaching of the doctrine, may be noticed in these. This, it should be remembered, was a simple artistic device to stress their eternal value; the spectators seeing them again and again unconsciously become aware of the great truth, its compelling urgency and its omnipresence. In Hindu temples are depicted scenes from the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* and other legends connected with the deities. These are so prominently displayed that they can hardly escape the attention of even a casual observer.

METHOD OF NARRATION

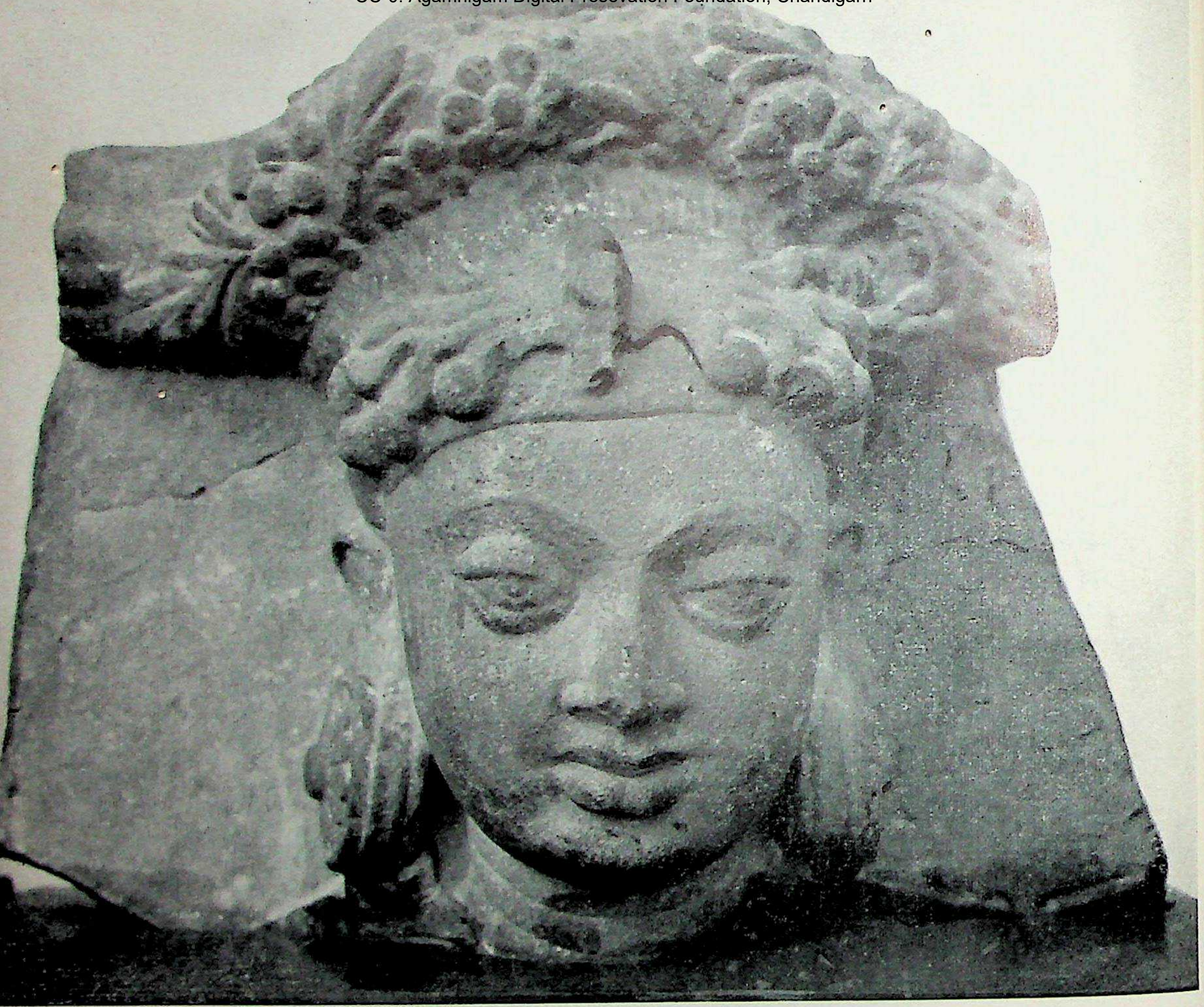
When a story was told in a single panel, all the important incidents were depicted in it, giving a complete picture of the whole story at a glance. The principal characters were represented as many times as required to cover the main incidents. This method is best made clear by an illustration of the medallion depicting the *Ruru Jātaka* at Bhārhut (Fig. 11).

The Buddha, in one of his previous births, was a compassionate deer with the name of Ruru. Once, on seeing a merchant floundering in a stream, the deer leaped into the stream, took the merchant on its back and swam ashore. But the merchant was a vicious and greedy person. Having escaped danger, it occurred to him that he could win a big reward by helping the king of Banaras to catch this fine animal. With treachery in his heart, he cleverly led Ruru deep into the forest where the king happened to be hunting. Leaving the unsuspecting Ruru near the scene of the hunt on some clever pretext, the merchant joined the king to whom he described the great virtues of this rare animal. The king was pleased at the prospect of hunting this deer. Reaching the glade where Ruru was grazing, the king aimed his arrow at the deer when Ruru, to the great surprise of everyone present, forbade the king to shoot at him. While the astonished king stayed his hand, the miraculous deer admonished him on the duties of a virtuous life.



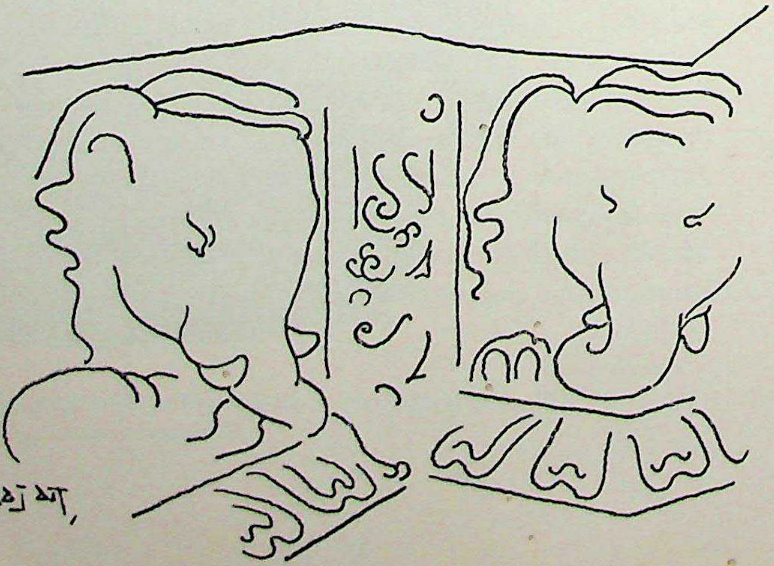
XIII. Colossal Head of Buddha from Mathura, Gupta, 5th Century A.D.

Mathura Museum

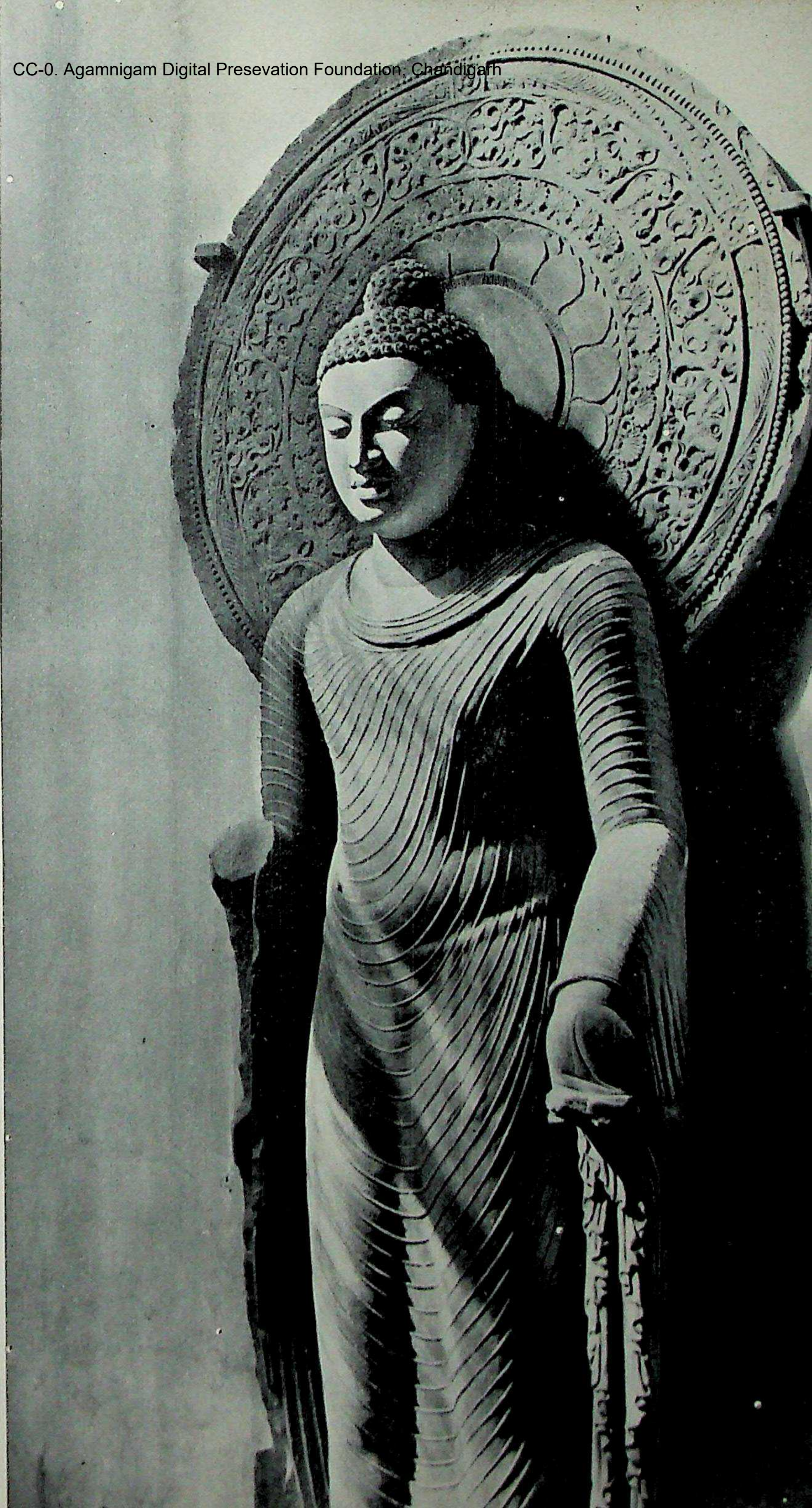


XIV A. Head of a Lady,
6th Century A.D.

Mathura Museum

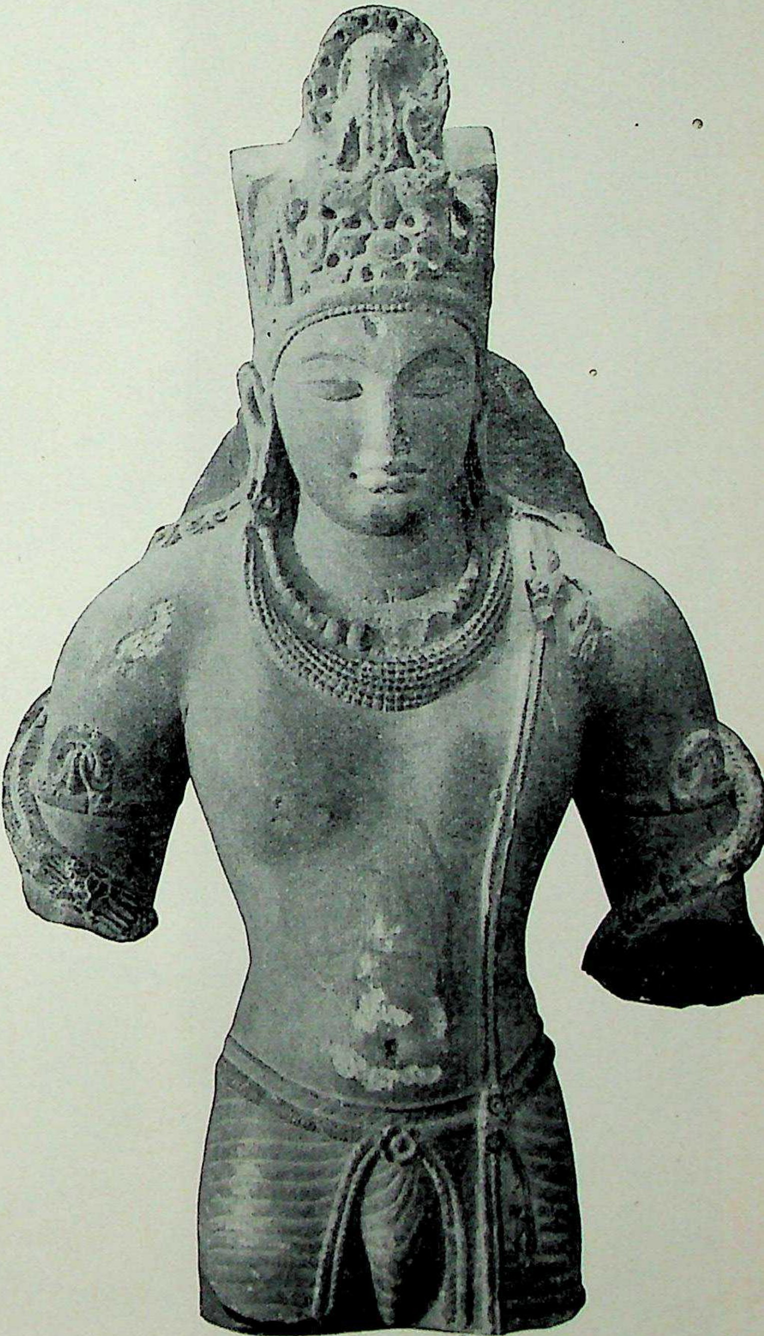


XIV B.
Elephants, a decorative motif
from Kailasanatha, Pallava



XV. Buddha figure from Mathura, Gupta, 5th Century A.D.

National Museum of India



XVII. Vishnu from Mathura, Gupta, 5th Century A.D.

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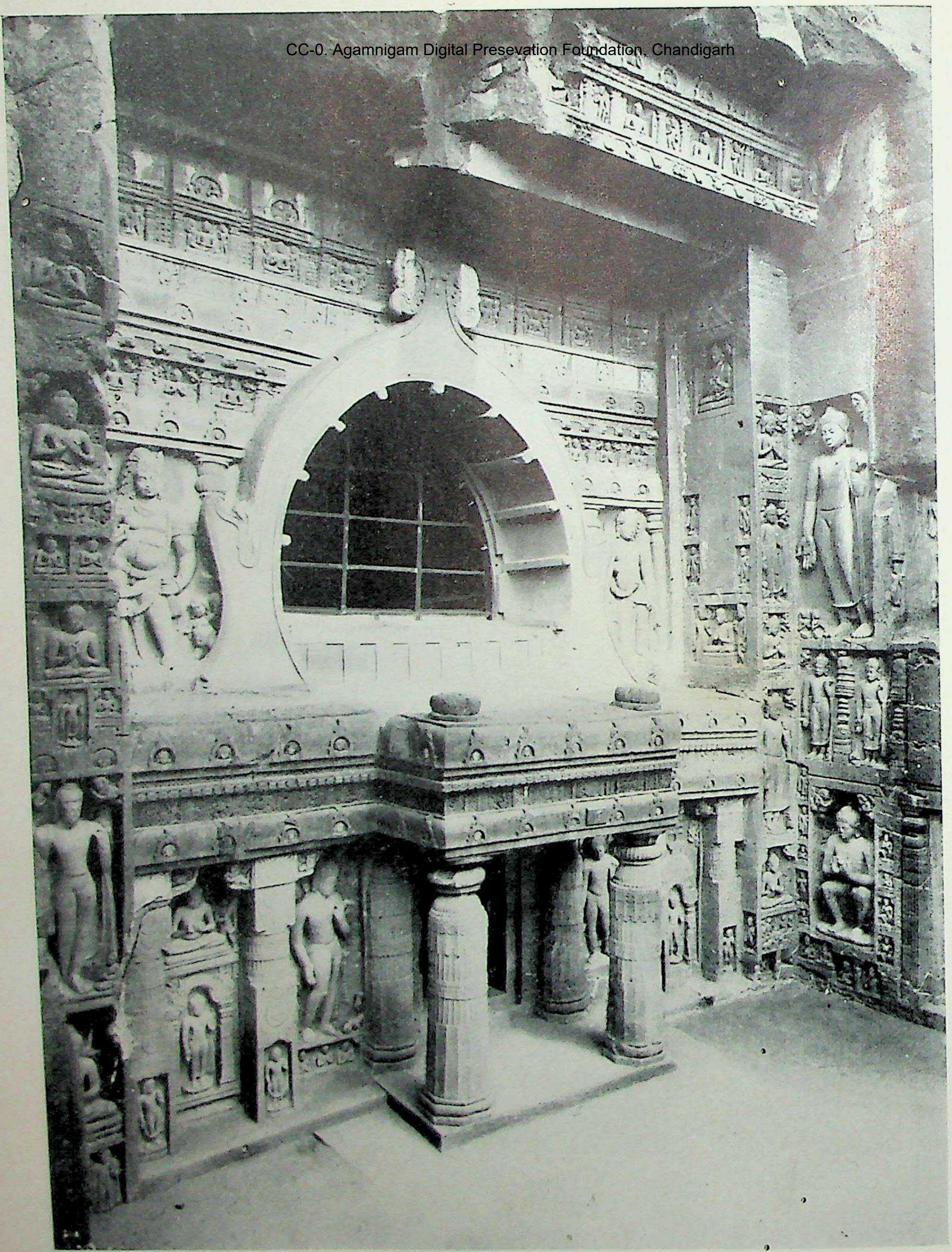
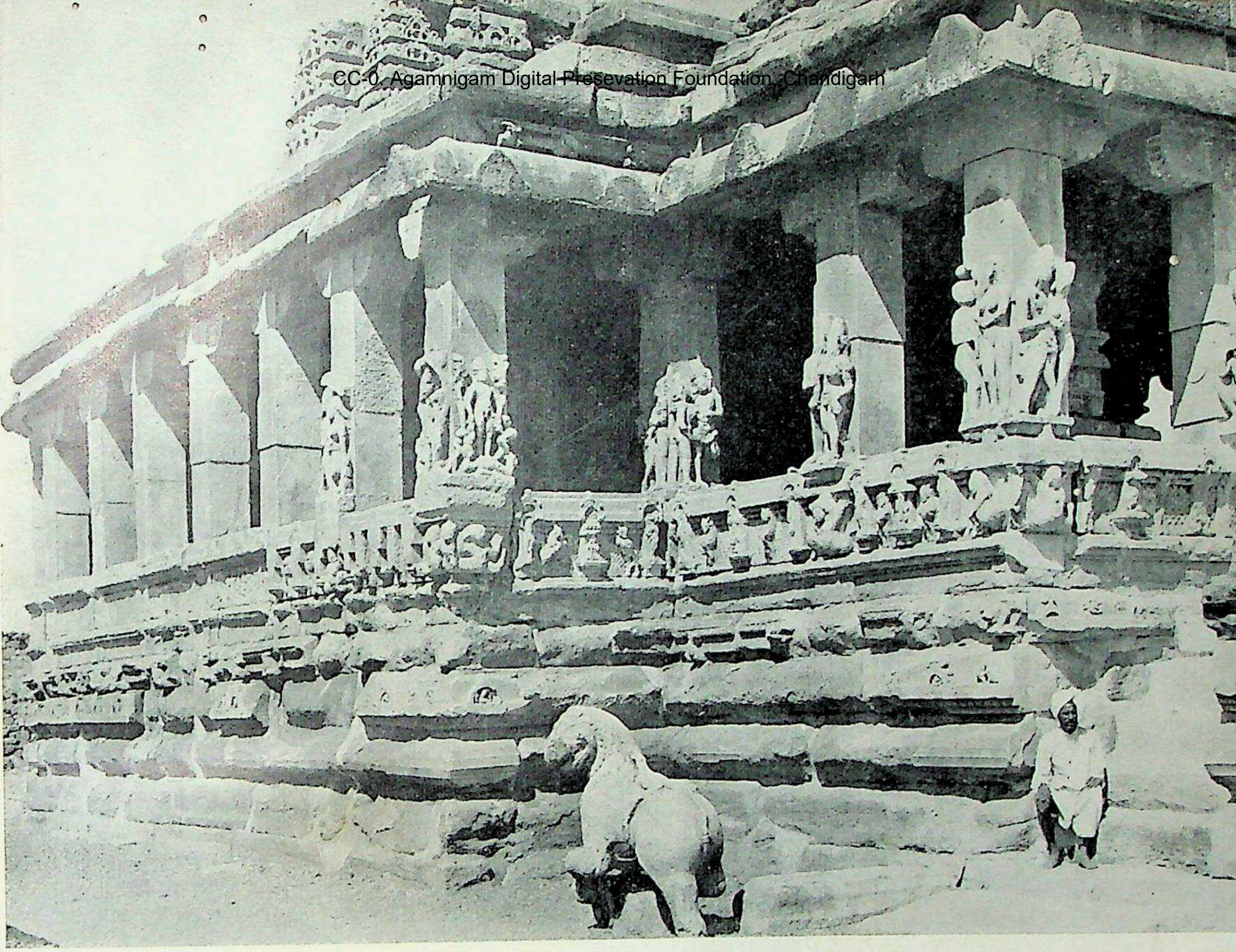
← XVI. Gopis churning curd, Gupta, 6th Century A.D.

Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras



XVIII. Facade of Cave No. XIX, Ajanta, 5th Century A.D.



XIX. Durga Temple, Aihole, Chalukyan, 6th Century A.D.

In the lower part of the medallion the deer swims towards the shore bearing the merchant it had saved. In the upper part, it appears once more with the herd after having brought the merchant ashore. The forest is represented by a clump of trees in the midst of which the herd moves. At the extreme right of the medallion the treacherous merchant, having brought the king near the herd, points out Ruru to the king and the king aims the arrow. In the centre of the medallion the deer is seen lying down and addressing the king, unafraid and with great dignity. The

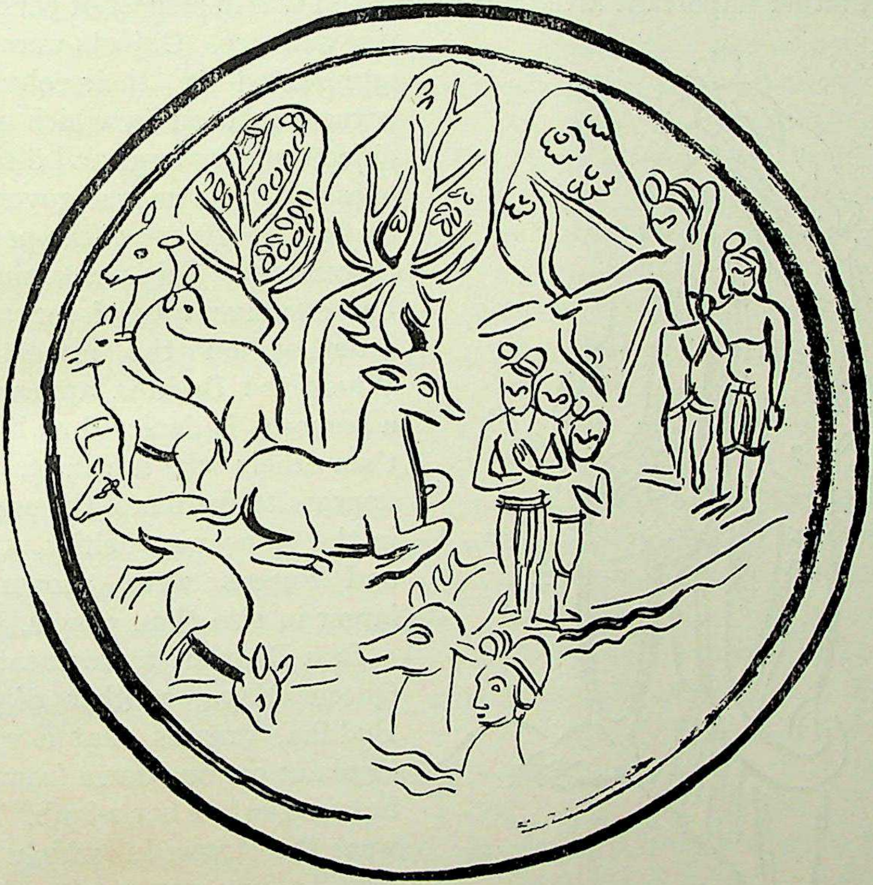


FIG. 11
Ruru Jātaka—Bhārhut

← Pl. XX. Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal, Chalukyan, 8th Century king is listening attentively to its advice and his hands are folded in salutation.

PERSPECTIVE AND SIZE

Another important artistic rule adopted was in respect of perspective and size. Objects were not represented in their obvious natural relation in which near objects appear large and distant ones small. Size was governed by the importance of the person represented. This was a simple but effective way of focussing attention on the important. Where the Buddha appears in a scene he is depicted as larger than others who are in it. He appears to dominate the scene ; in the same way deities, kings and queens were shown as larger in size than others.

In a Bhārhut representation, Queen Maya, mother of the Buddha, dreams that a white elephant coming down from the heavens enters her womb. This was the form in which the Buddha was supposed to have come down from heaven to be born as prince Siddhārtha. Here, the queen is depicted as much larger than her attendants, including those in the foreground. A classic example where size conveys importance is found in a fifth century monument at Udayagiri. On a huge rock surface

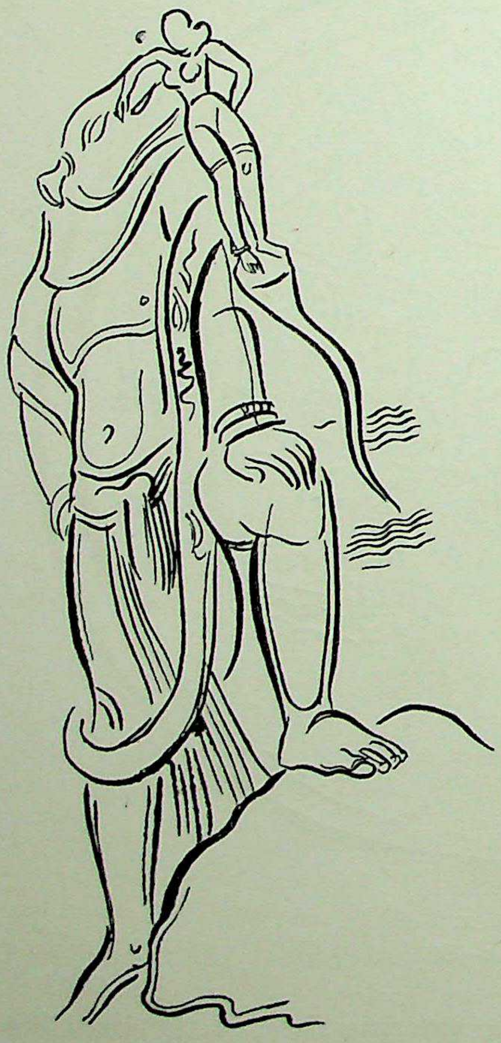


FIG. 12
Varāha lifting the Earth-Goddess—Udayagiri

the legend of the rescue of the Earth-Goddess (Bhu Devi) is depicted. The legend says that the goddess was dragged down to the bottom of the Great Flood where she lay helpless and captive. Then Vishnu assumed the form of a boar (*varāha*) in a half-human and half-animal shape, dived into the waters and rescued the goddess. In the Udayagiri relief the form of the *varāha* is seen rising over the primeval waters (Fig. 12). Its giant figure dominates the rock surface; it is powerful and super-human. The tremendous upward movement from the depth of the waters to the far distant surface is impressively conveyed. The figure of the Earth-Goddess is fragile, comparatively small, and she is lifted with apparent ease. She stands on a lotus pedestal and the sinuous stalk repeats the rhythmic sway of her elegant form. The massive shoulder of the boar, raised a little by the tenseness of the hand resting on the bent knee, conveys the impression of great strength.

FLYING FIGURES

Flying figures of the Gandharvas and other heavenly beings which appear frequently are never shown with wings. The movement through air and its speed are well suggested by the attitude of the flying figures and the feeling of weightless ease they convey (Pls. VI & XXXI). These superior beings do not require the aid of wings for propulsion through air since they can move at their will.

MITHUNA

Conventional motifs like *Mithuna*, the productive couple, occur frequently. These are fine representations of man and woman enjoying their nearness to one another (Pl. XXVII). They are depicted in varying moods and postures, some of which are frankly erotic. Others, which in intimacy and tenderness reflect the whole drama of the relationship of man and woman, are remarkably free from any sentimentality.[16] In the *bandhas* or erotic postures depicted in Konarak and

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[16] "Even in its erotic passages it (Indian art) is the least suggestive art in the world." Codrington, *An Introduction to the Study of Mediaeval Indian Sculpture.*

Khajuraho, the Indian artist with a boldness of imagination unparalleled in the history of art, makes the creative urge and its ecstasy the theme for his plastic delineation. One can hardly imagine anything more fundamentally human and universal in its sway.

THE HUMAN FIGURE

The human figure in Indian art was treated in a very different way from that in Western art. Indian art canons demand that veins and bones should not be visible. Muscles were never stressed. The body is shown as smooth, shiny and supple. Grace and rhythmic sweep are its chief qualities. Strength and vitality are inherent in the "lionlike" form of the male with broad chest and narrow waist just as swelling hips and breasts emphasise the charms and loveliness of womanhood (Pls. II, VIII B and IX). In treatment there is hardly any distinction between the body of a human being and that of a god for both alike become the "embodiment of the life movement". In all periods of Indian art the special attention of the artist was devoted to assimilating garments and ornaments to the form which they adorned. Clothes were so treated as not to impede the plastic rhythms of the body. The garments clinging to the body are mostly thin and revealing; sometimes they are almost invisible but for their borders. What may appear to the casual observer to be nude figures are in reality tastefully robed and bejewelled. The nude, as it exists in Western art, hardly ever figures in Indian art though full expression was given to the rich sensuous charm of the human form in a way hardly excelled elsewhere.

Though the world of flora and fauna was the subject of the skill of the Indian artist, nothing interested or excited him so much as the world of men and women. Men and women crowd his compositions and they are presented in an infinite variety of attitudes that make the scenes presented lively, graceful and intimate. The artist revels in the beauty of their figures, "in the multiplicity of their poses, in the vital flowing lines of their forms, casting over all this human and intellectual art the charm of his decorative fancy."[17]

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[17] Sir John Marshall, *Influence of Race on Early Indian Art*, Rupam, No. 18.

ALAMKĀRA

According to the Indian theory of beauty, *alamkāra* or appropriate ornament is considered essential to enhance beauty. The love of ornament, deeply ingrained in the Indian mind, is fully reflected in Indian poetry as well as in Indian art. The wealth of decorative beauty that characterises the early phase of Indian art at Bhārhut and Sanchi persists through all phases of Indian art through the centuries, no doubt with varying emphasis (Pls. v, XIV B, XV, XXIII, XXXII, XXXIV & XLVI). It is revealed in an infinite variety of patterns and designs (winding and spreading creepers, scrolls, volutes, clouds, rosettes, geometrical patterns, roundels, aureoles, arabesques and so on). In the treatment of the human figure this love of decoration is fully evident in the way the drapery is worn, in the varied rhythmic patterns it forms, in the tasteful jewellery that adorns the body, in the graceful headgears and in the lovely coiffures or hair styles. It is mostly a heritage from the non-Aryan past and is strongly manifested in the Dravidian South.

FORM, SPACE AND MATERIAL

Even a casual student of Indian art will notice that the Indian artist loves to fill all available space with forms; rarely is any space allowed to remain vacant. The crowded, clustered and exuberant forms, though without any formal arrangement, achieve a sort of natural harmony.

Form in Indian sculpture is entirely conceptual and form and material are closely linked. No attempt was ever made to conceal the nature of the material from which the sculptor carves or to denature it in the process. As Codrington rightly puts it, "the form imposed on the material is always well founded and the figures, however extravagant the posture may be, always stand. The design springs from below like a growing thing. . . . The finished work is well founded like the rock itself which contained it in all its parts before the chisel touched it." Naturally, it is massive; and he traces a parallel to this quality of the Indian sculpture in the massiveness of Indian thought "which in the main, is not concerned with argument, but is almost entirely occupied with a few basic conceptions, among which the realization of impermanence is dominant."

The feeling of serenity that pervades Indian works of art is another of its distinguishing characteristics and this no doubt is the result of the deep Indian desire to attain a calmness of mind and a perfect sense of balance. This quality is well reflected even in such figures as that of the dancing Siva, who is depicted as whirling in space and who while doing so is engaged in the activity of creation, preservation and destruction, and yet appears completely detached; so tranquil is the expression of the eyes and the face (Pl. XXXVIII). The same sense of tranquillity and detachment is noticeable in the figures of Mahishāsuramardini who slays the buffalo demon in a relentless fight. Fundamentally opposed tensions are found perfectly balanced. Such great works of Indian art as the Buddha in contemplation, the triune head of Mahesamūrti (Pl. XXVI), the Ardhanārīsvara, and Vishnu as the pillar of the universe, are extremely significant conceptions that have achieved a triumph over tensions by rising superior to them. Rarely has art elsewhere been called upon to symbolise or render such subtle and profound intellectual and metaphysical conceptions or transcendant states of experience as in India.

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3. Principal Hindu Deities

BRAHMA

Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are the principal Hindu deities. The scriptures make it amply clear that they are the three personified aspects of the One Supreme Being. Brahma is the Creator, but creation having been completed, he is no longer an active god. His powers are absorbed by Vishnu and Siva whose cults have attained wider popularity. Today, Brahma is hardly worshipped as other popular deities are. Nevertheless, Brahma images appear in the temples dedicated to Vishnu and Siva and in Buddhist shrines.

When Vishnu thought of creating the universe, a miraculous golden lotus of a thousand petals stemmed out of his navel and Brahma emerged from this flower. He is variously called *Abja-yoni* (lotus-born), *Chaturānana* (four-faced one), *Pitāmaha* (grandsire of the human race) and so on. The legend of his origin, though clothed in the language of symbolism, is clearly indicative of his functions and powers. The navel is associated with the procreative faculty and the lotus represents the manifested universe. The lotus which is a water plant is also a symbol for water as well as for the primordial waters. As a lotus rests on water, so, too, the universe rests on the primordial waters. Water is a life-bestowing, sustaining and fertilising substance and therefore it remains the emblem of life. There are many personifications of the life-giving powers of water of which Vishnu[18] himself, as *Nārāyana*, is the chief. Brahma's four faces represent the four quarters of the universe (Pl. XXIII). He bears in one hand a water pot which symbolises his function as the creator. In another hand, he holds the four Vedas indicating that he is the source of supreme wisdom ; sometimes he bears a sacrificial spoon. In the third hand he may hold a rosary, indicative of his predominantly spiritual bent of mind, and the fourth hand may assume the *varada mudra*. From this conception of Brahma, the Creator, it should be easy to understand why an emphasis is laid in India on prayer and meditation as a prerequisite for all work, especially of a creative nature. In one of his hands Brahma may be found holding a phial containing the elixir of life as befitting his position as the lord of all life. He rides a *hamsa* (a mythical bird) which is a symbol of the pure soul. The *hamsa* is reputed to possess the rare capacity to separate milk from water. In other words, it takes in only the pure and rejects all corruption and defilement. Thus Brahma is the source of all life, of knowledge and of purity.

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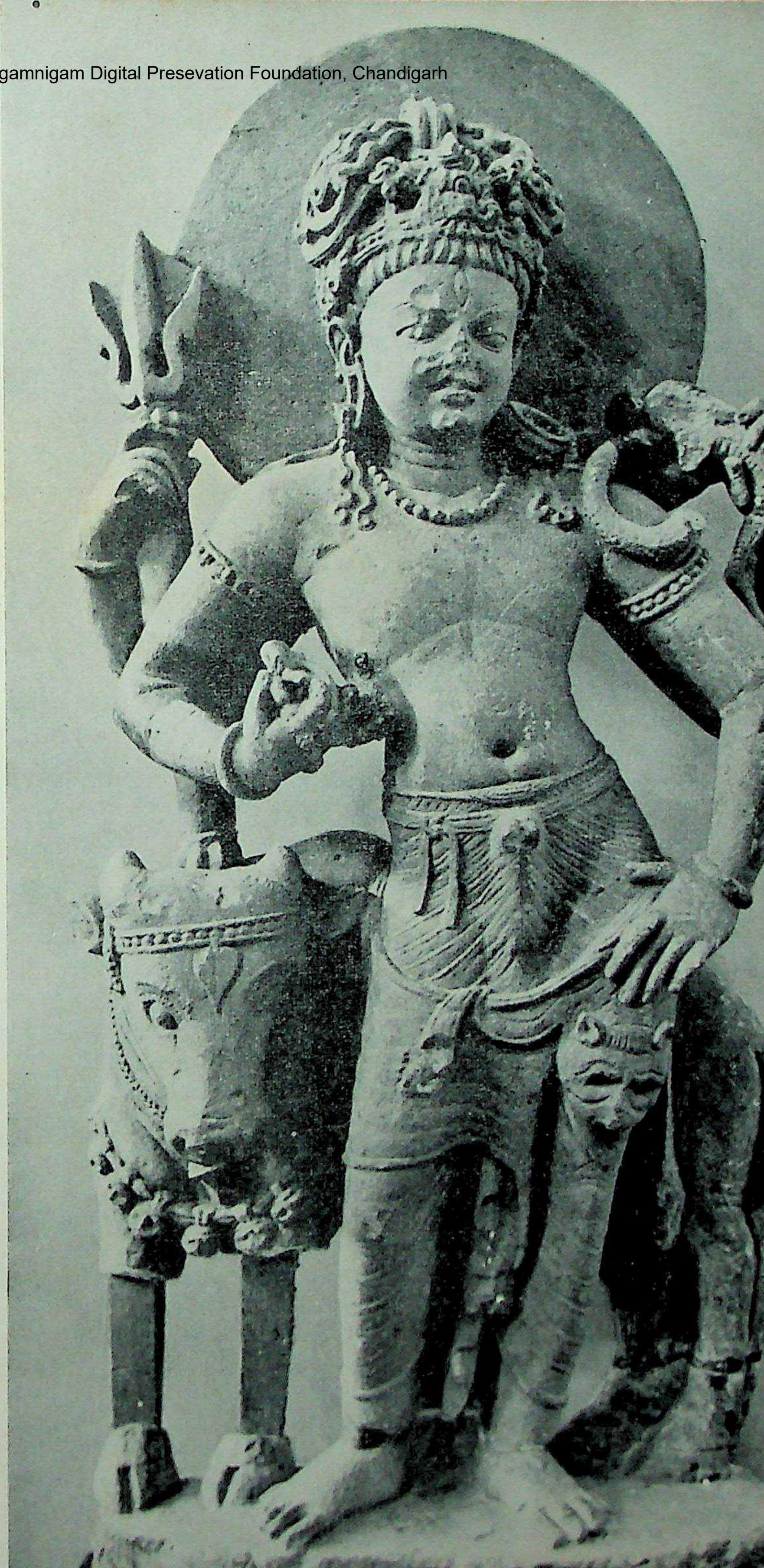
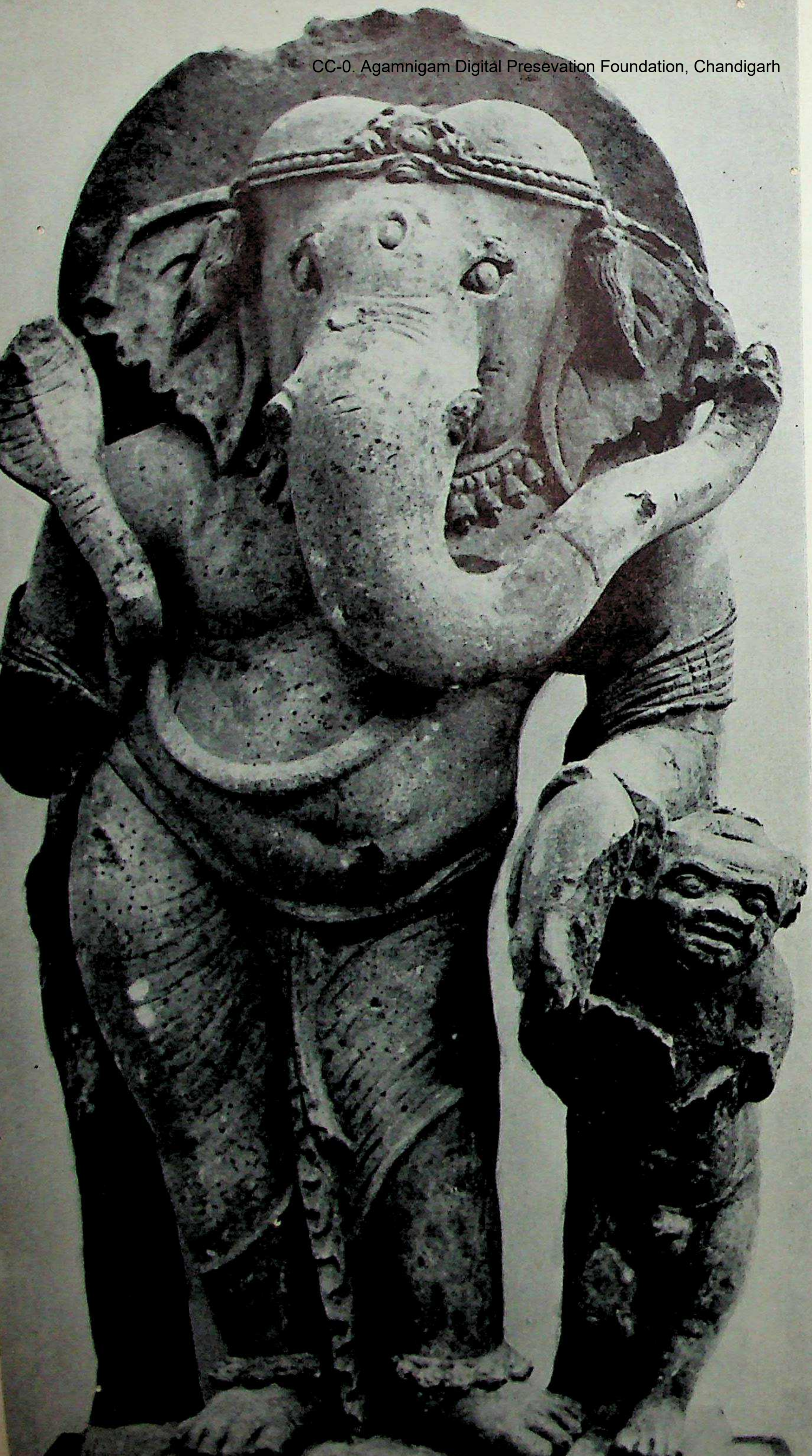
[18] Vishnu's mount is Garuda (eagle), the implacable foe of serpents. "Vishnu is linked with these eternal antagonists, Sesha representative of the cosmic waters and Garuda the conquering principle for He is the Absolute, the All-containing Principle. The Absolute becomes differentiated in polarized manifestations and through these the vital tensions of the world process are brought into existence and maintained."—Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization.*

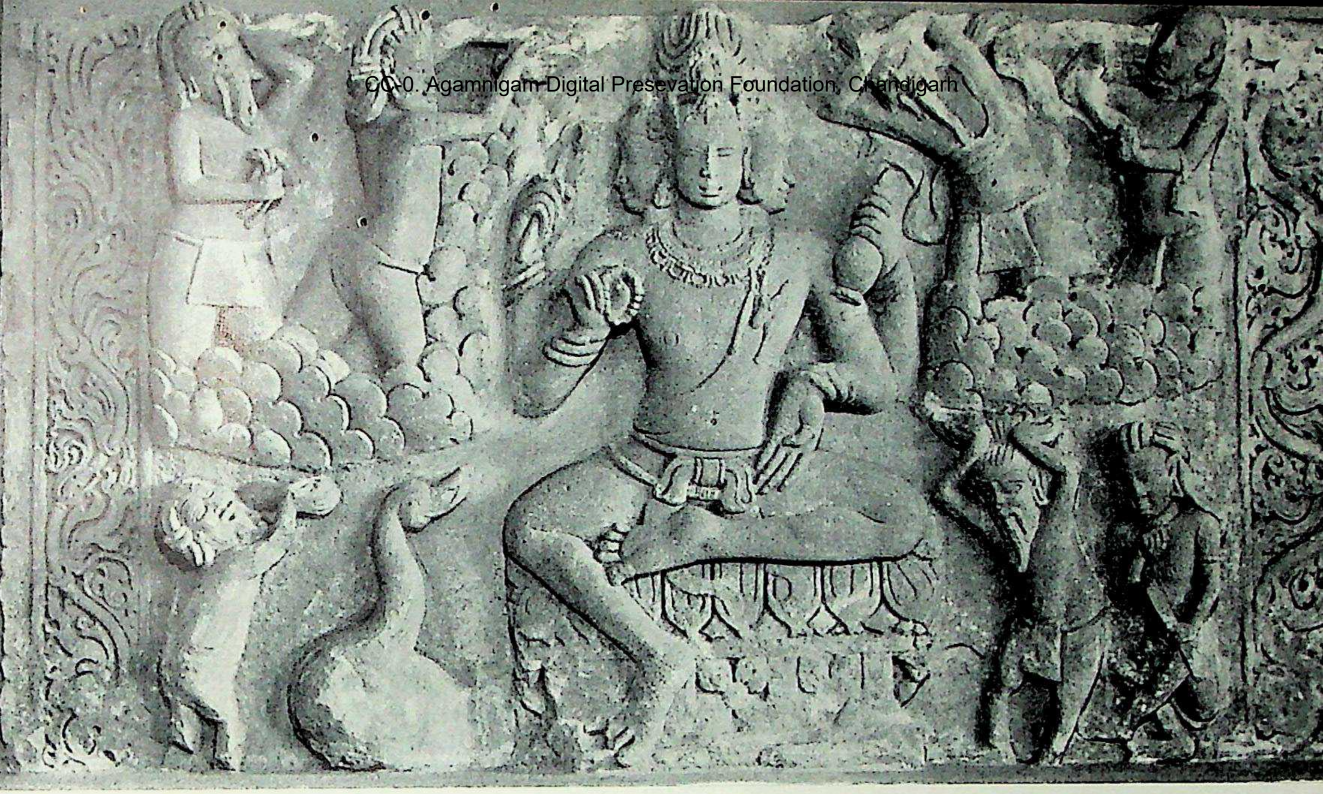
As the cult of Vishnu and Siva developed, these deities were conceived variously, with certain specific qualities stressed in each one of these conceptions. Of the many forms of Vishnu that of *Virāt Purusha* is the totality of all forms. A graphic description of this appears in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Vishnu in his passive aspect is conceived as reclining on the great serpent Ananta (Eternity), also called Ādi Sesha, in the midst of the primordial waters (Pl. XXV). He rests thus between two world cycles. This aspect of Vishnu is widely worshipped and there are numerous examples of this type of Vishnu image. In his active aspect Vishnu is the preserver and upholder of the universe and is the great guardian of the Law of Dharma. Whenever unrighteousness triumphs and the rhythm of the world order is disturbed, he manifests himself in the world and redeems it from its woes. So far, he has assumed nine incarnations. As Matsya (fish) he came to redeem the Vedas submerged in the Great Flood. As Kūrma (half-man and half-tortoise) he was the support to the mountain employed to churn the primordial waters to obtain *amrita*, the elixir that bestowed immortality on the gods. As Krishna and Buddha, Vishnu came to re-establish the Law of Dharma. The absorption of the Buddha



XXI. Siva from Samlaji,
Bombay State,
6th Century A.D.

Baroda Museum



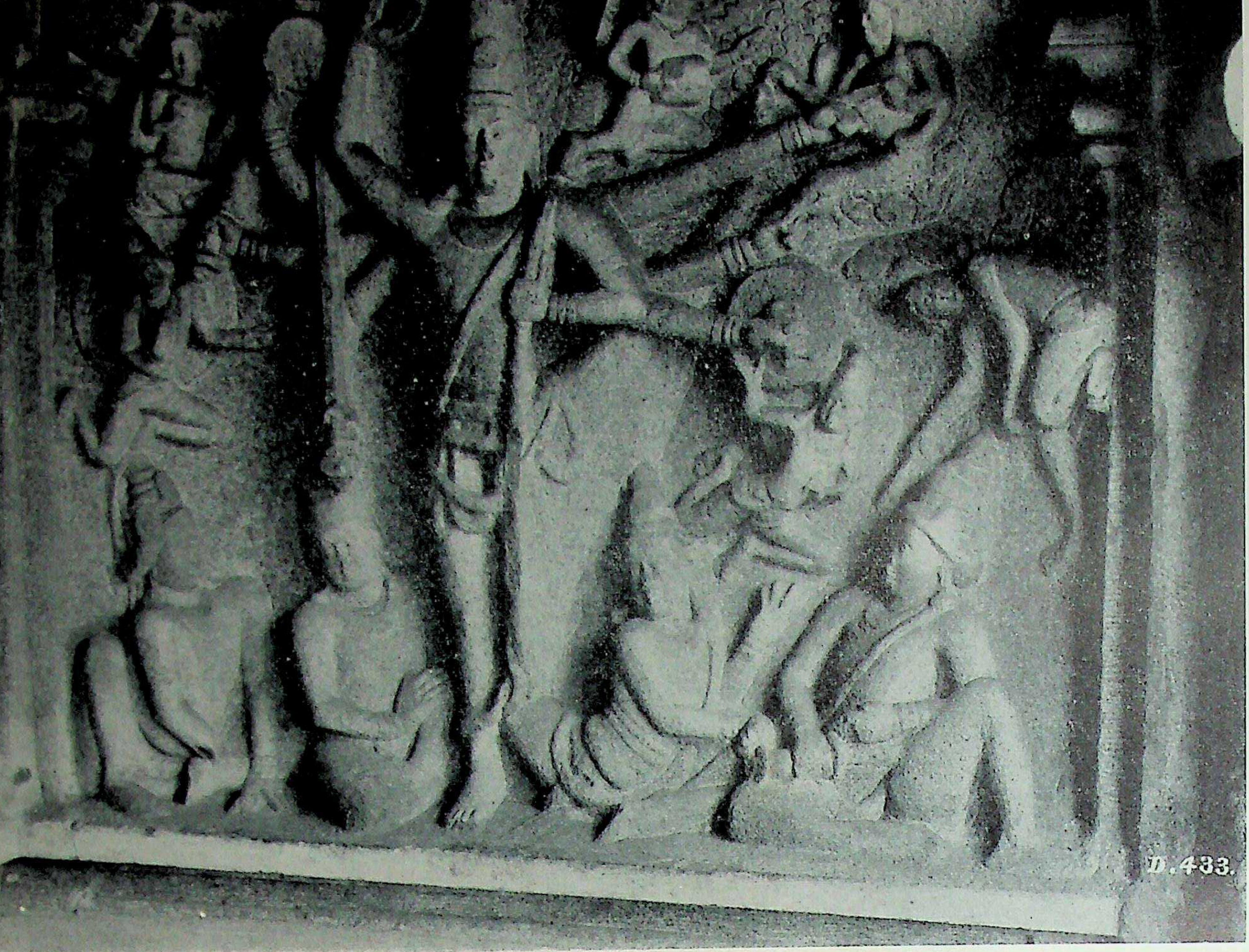


XXIII. Brahma, Aihole, 6th-7th Century A.D.

Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay

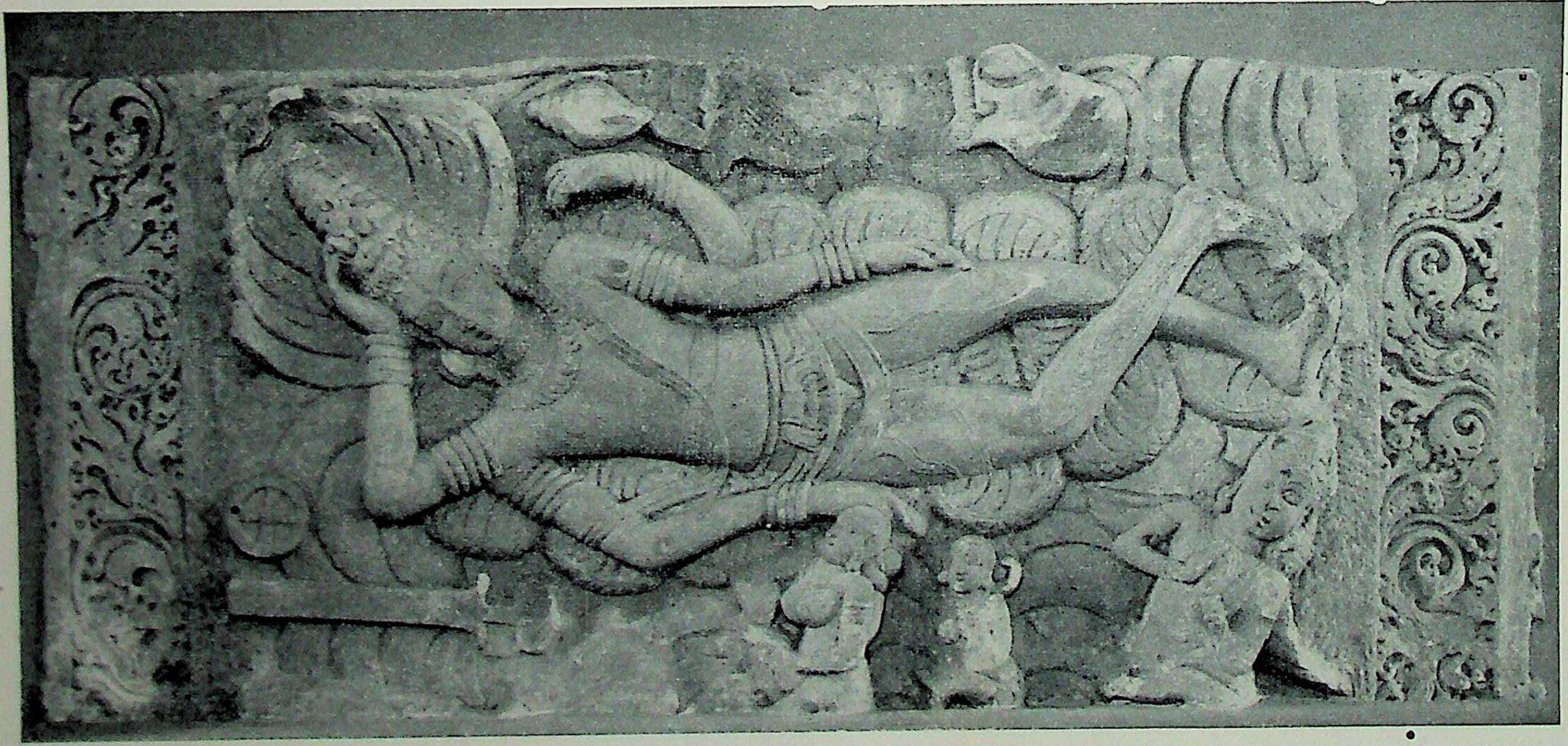
← XXII. Ganesa from Samlaji, Bombay State,
6th Century A.D.

Baroda Museum



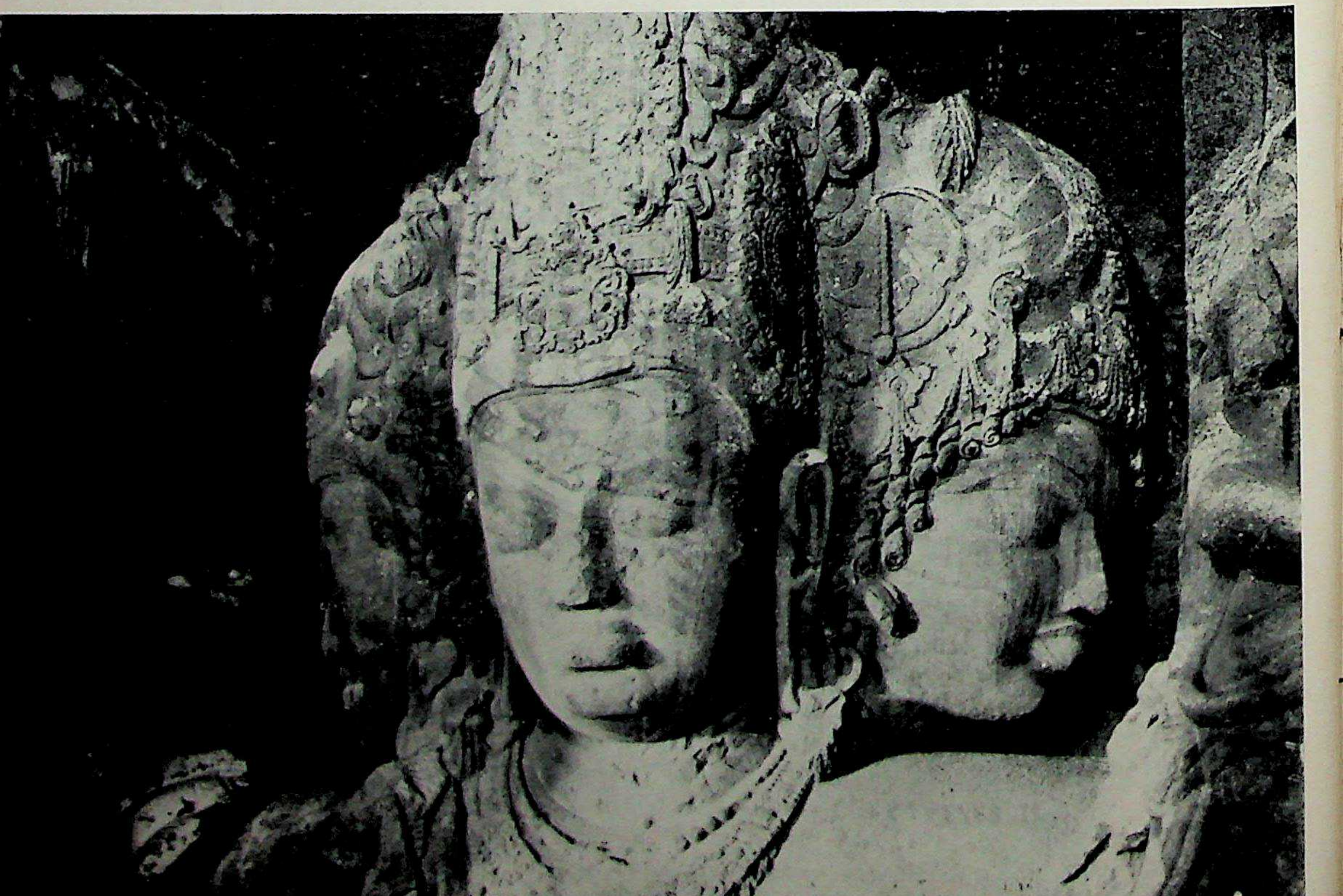
XXIV. Vishnu as Trivikrama, Mahabalipuram, Pallava, 7th Century A.D.

XXV. Vishnu, Aihole, 6th-7th Century
Frince of Wales Museum, Bombay



XXVII. Lovers in sportive mood, →
Kanchīpuram, Pallava

XXVI. Mahesamūrti, Elephanta, 7th Century A.D.



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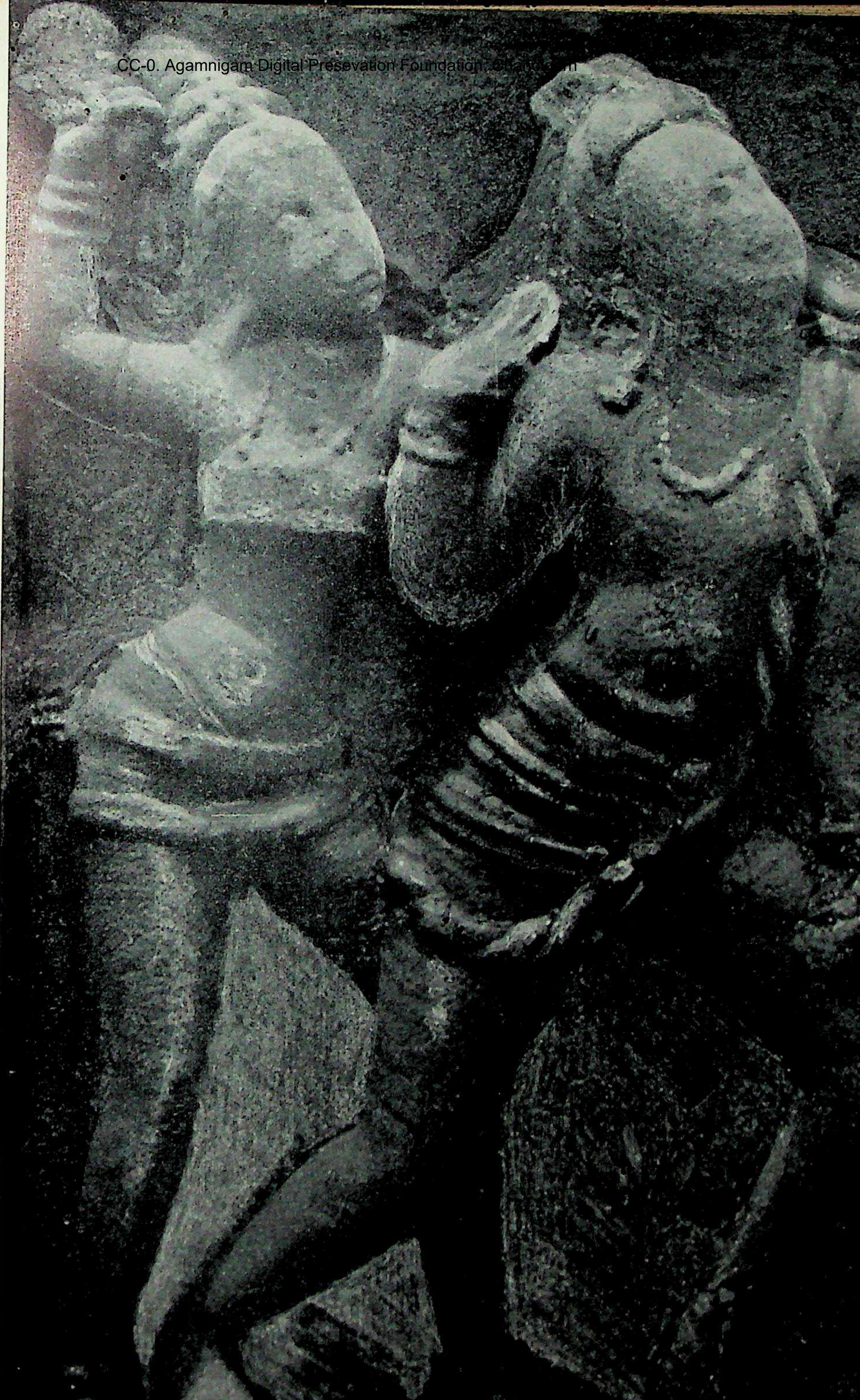
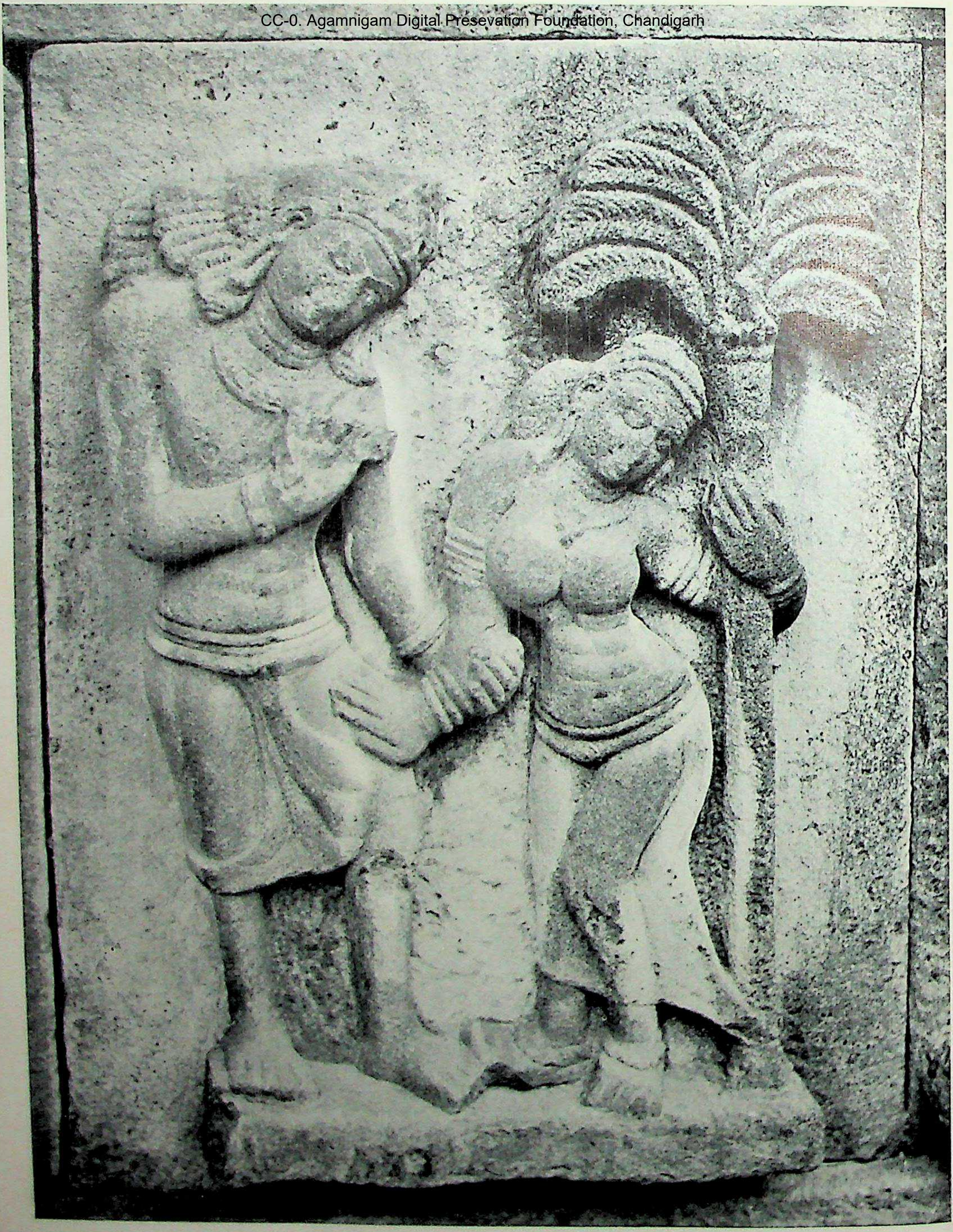
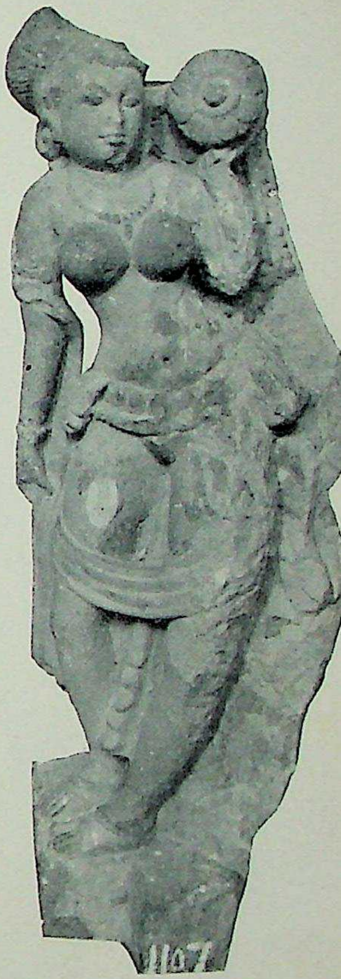


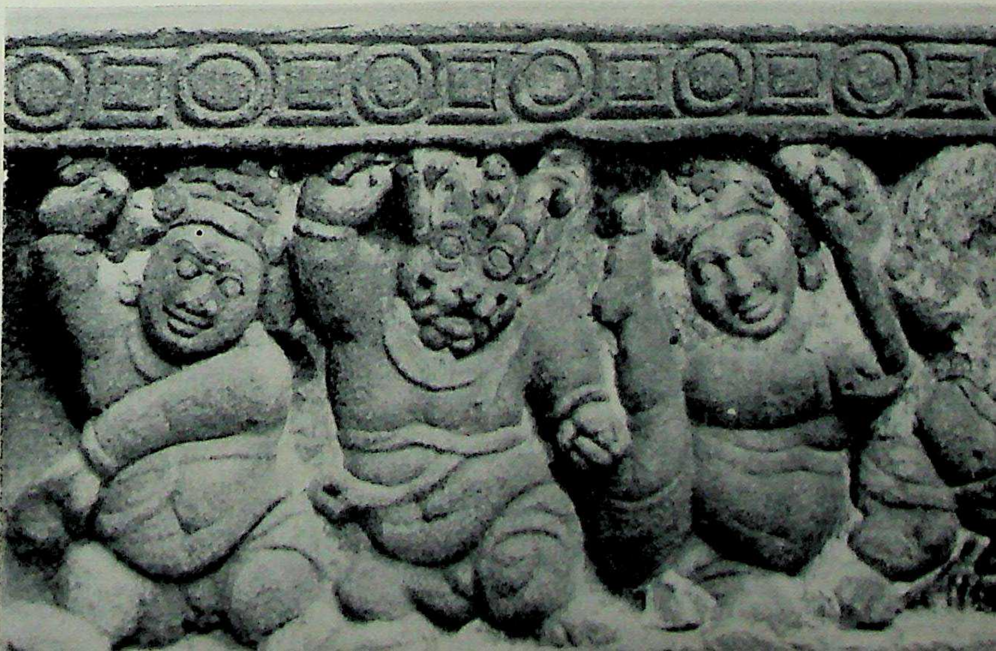


XXVIII. Lovers from Alampur Temple, 8th Century A.D.

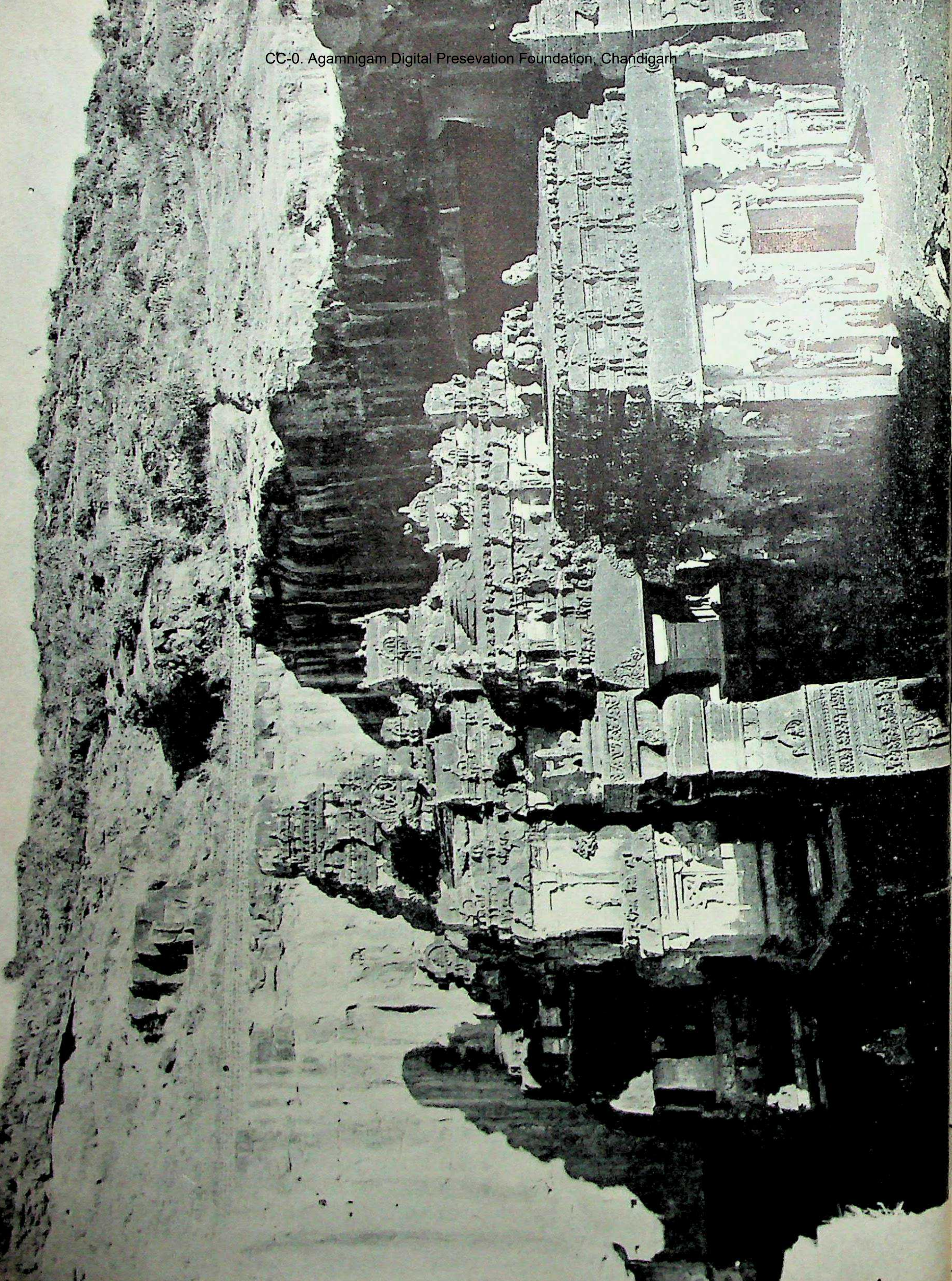


XXIX A. Female figure from Mathura, early medieval period

Mathura Museum

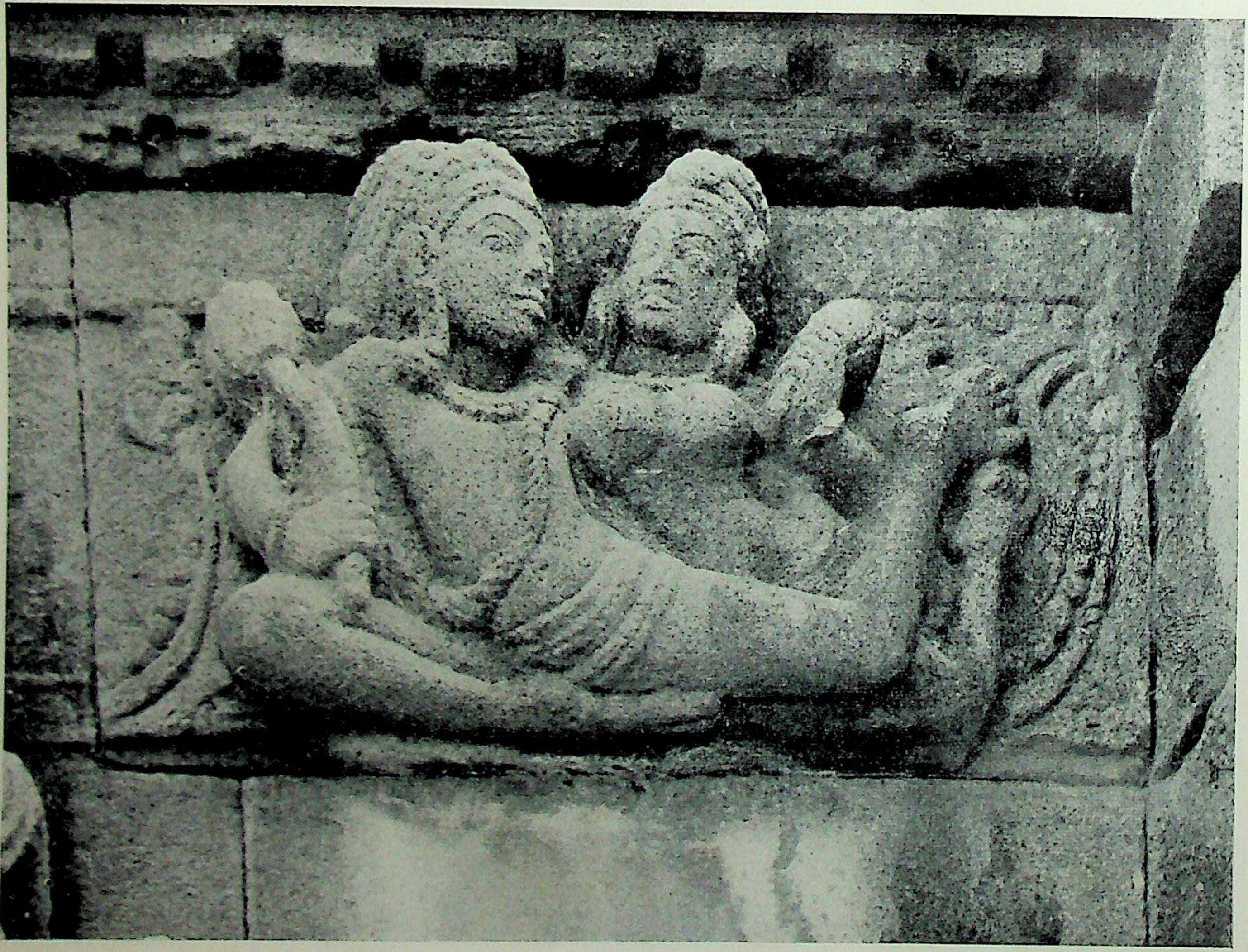


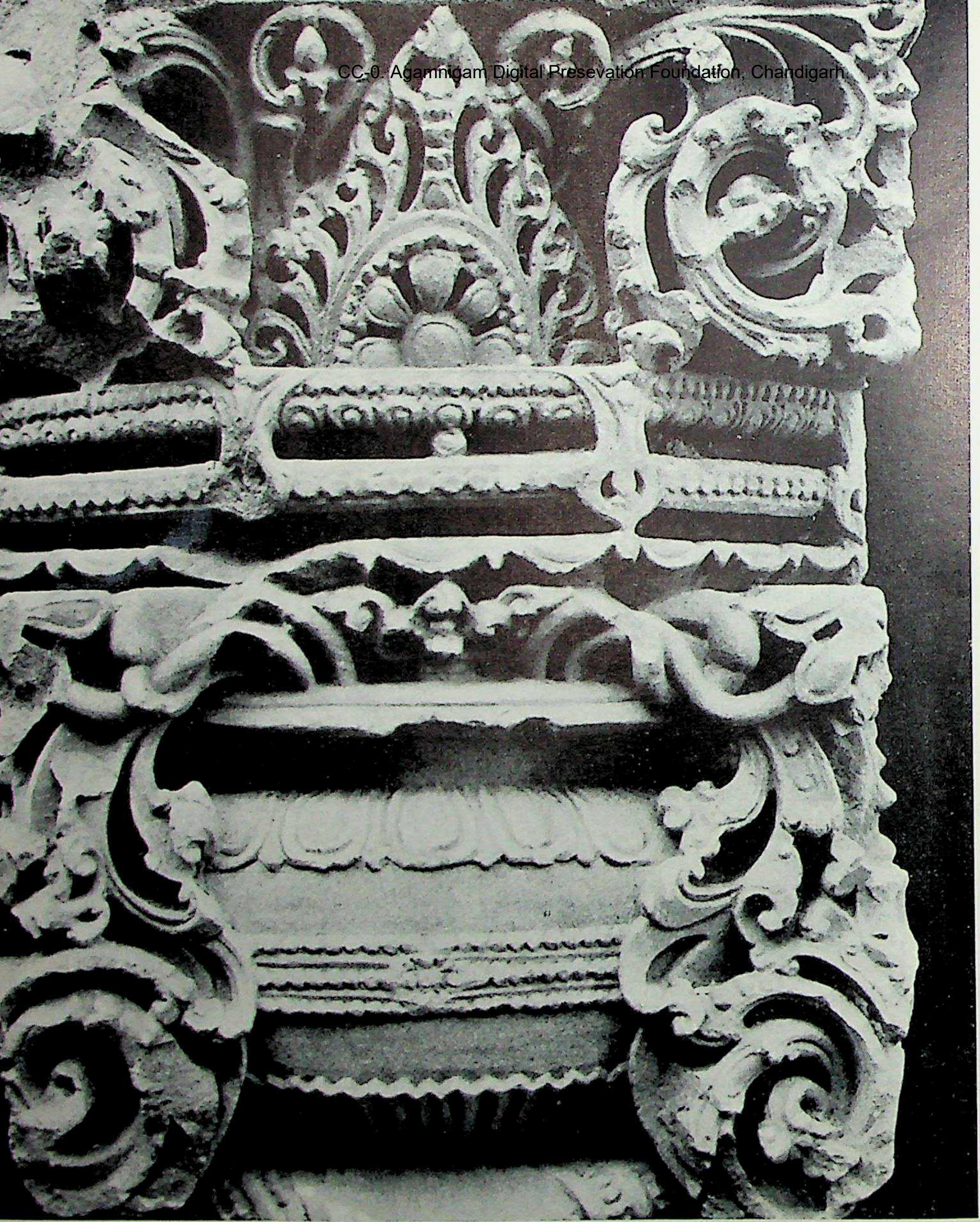
XXIX B. Ganas from Kailasanatha, Kānchīpuram, Pallava



XXX. Kailasa Temple, rock-cut, Ellora, 8th Century A.D.

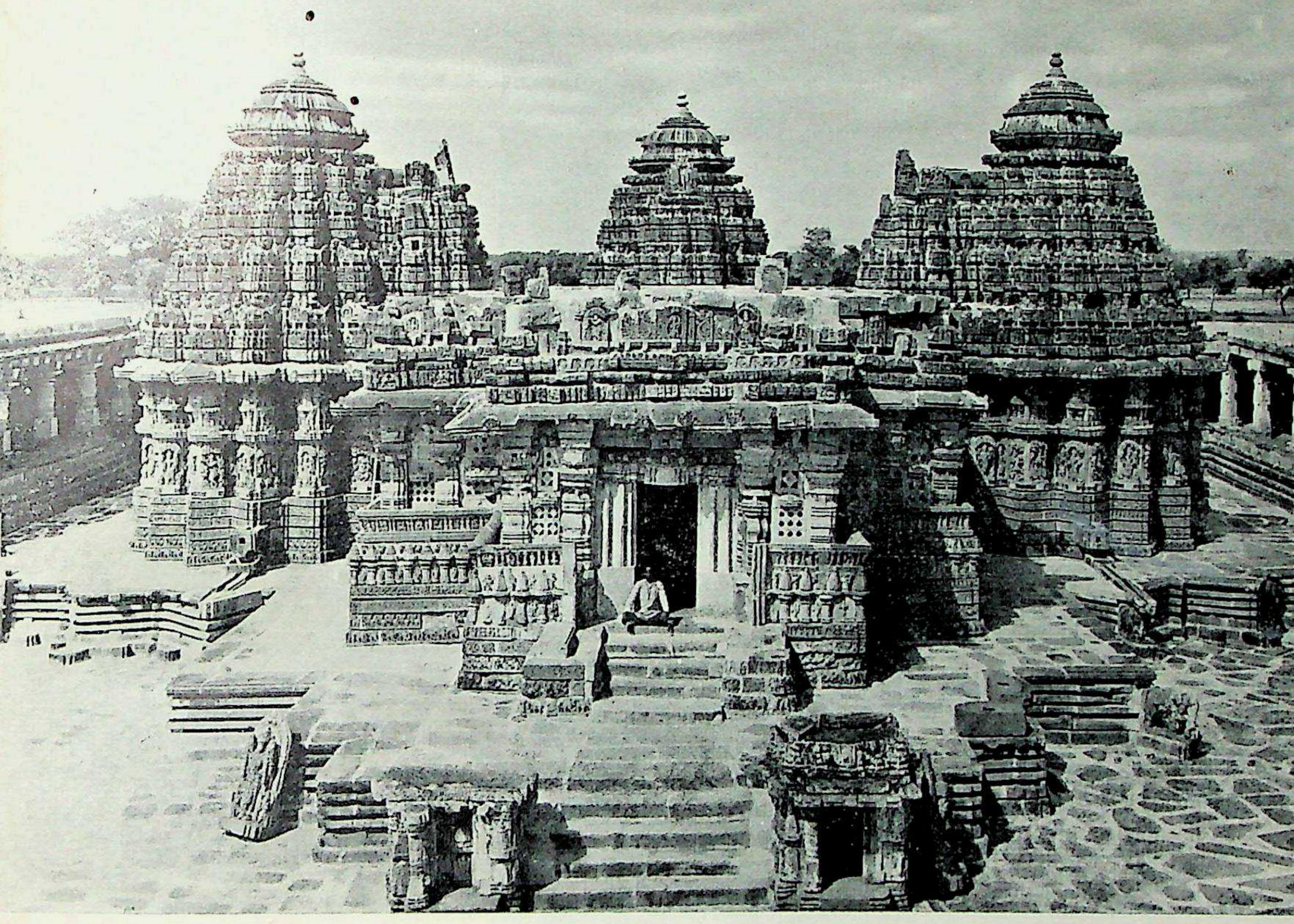
XXXI. Vidyadharas, Alampur Temple, 8th Century A.D.





XXXII. Detail of pillar showing over-flowing vase, post-Gupta, about 8th Century A.D.

Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaraṣ



XXXIII. Kesava Temple, Somnathpur, A.D. 1268

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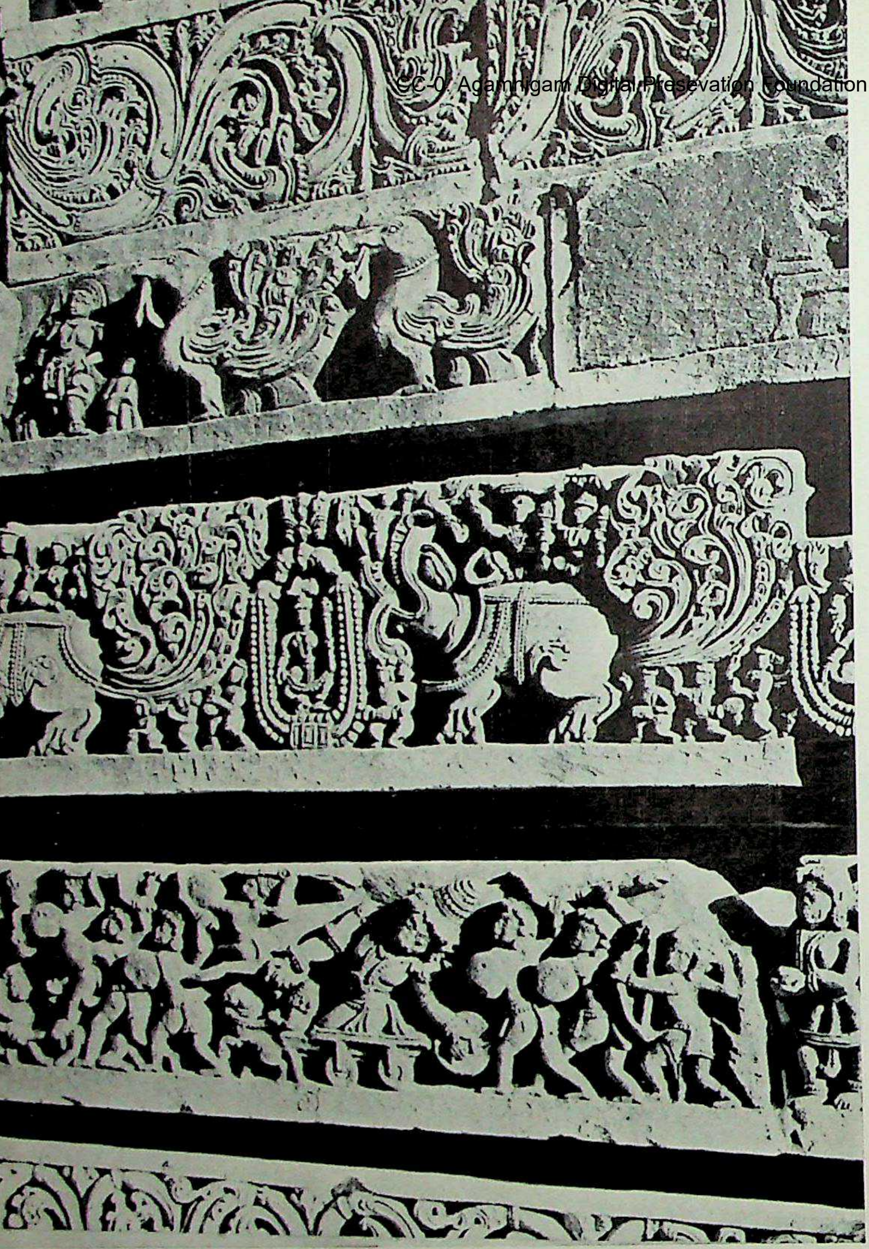
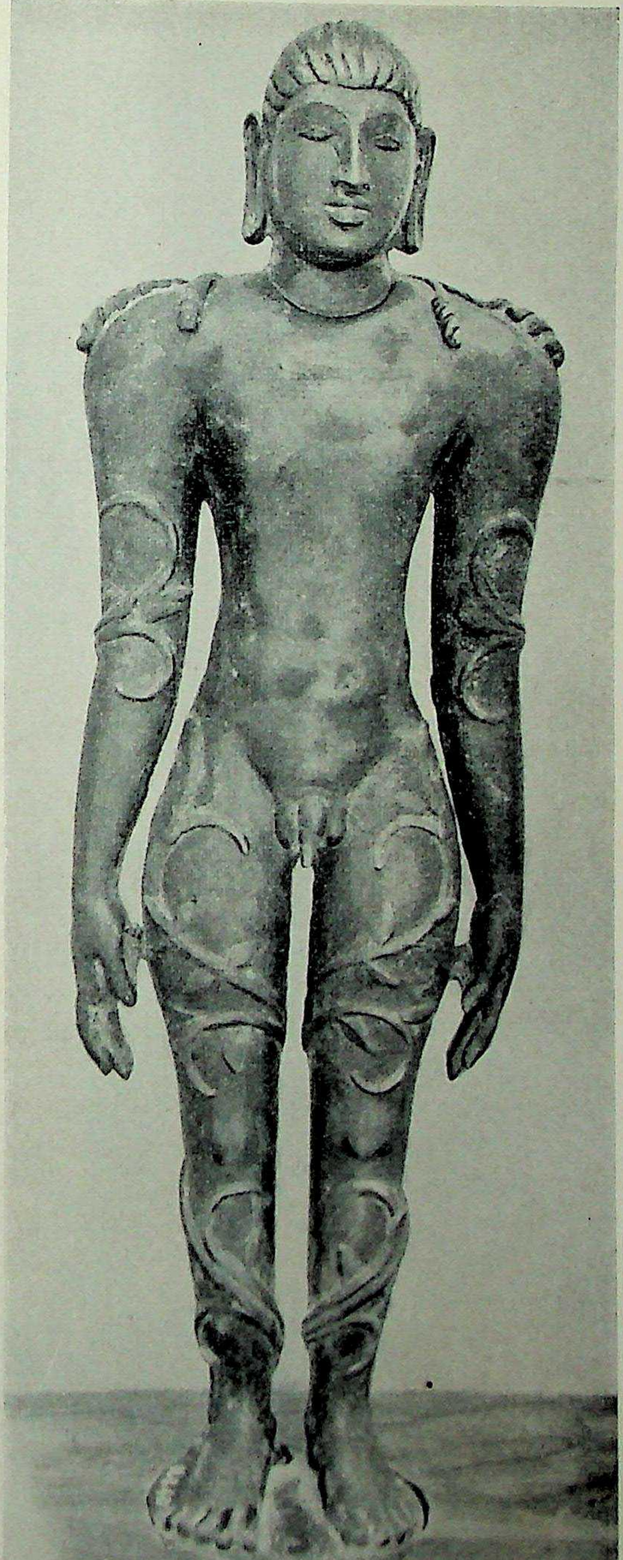
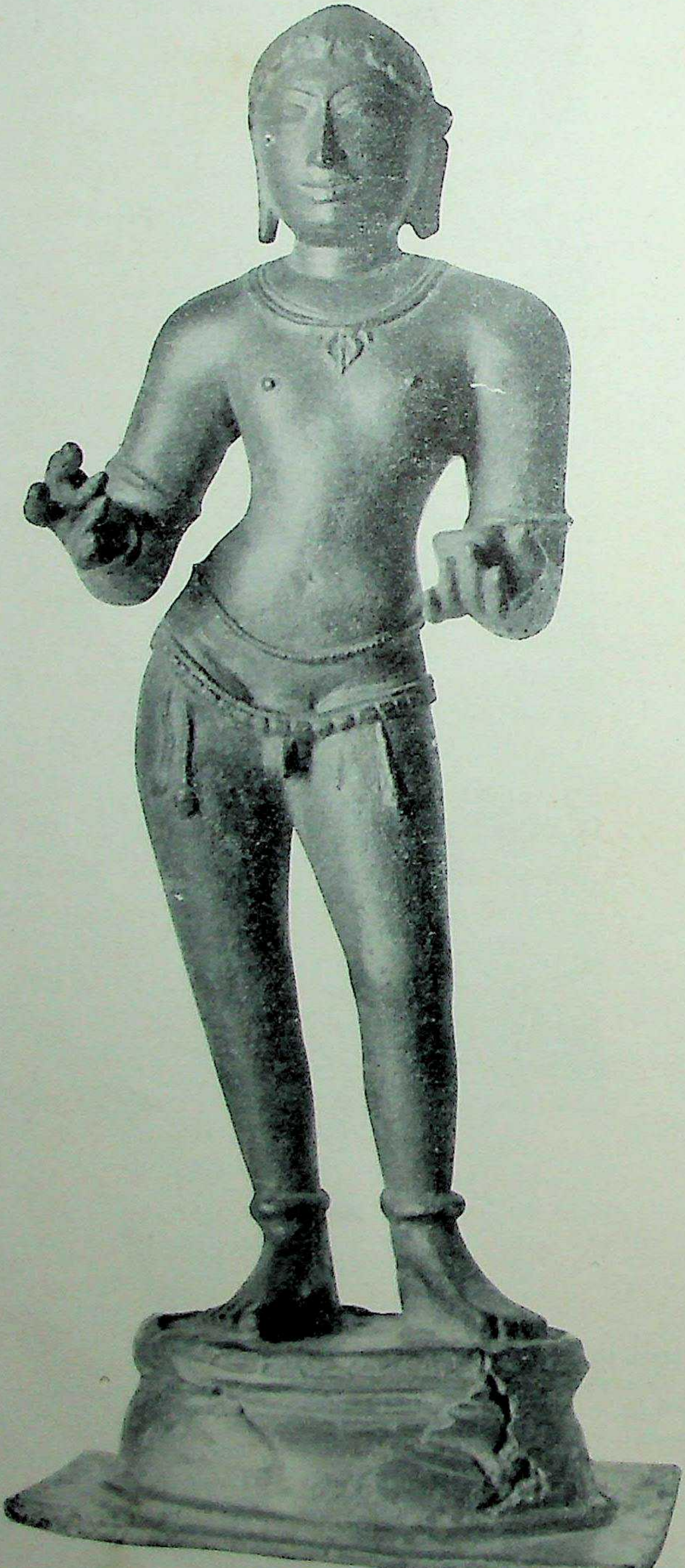


XXXIV. Detail of plinth of Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebid, 12th Century A.D.



XXXV. Bahubali in penance, Jain bronze image, from Sravana Belgola, 9th Century A.D.

Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay



XXXVI. Tirujnana Sambandha Swami, 14th Century

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

in the conception of Vishnu occurred about the time of the complete eclipse of Buddhism in India which took place in the ninth or tenth century.[19] Vishnu will again incarnate as Kalki at the end of this present age of Kali Yuga. He had assumed the form of Narasimha (half-man-half-lion), Vāmana (midget) and Rāma, the epic hero, to rid the world of *asuras* or demoniac beings like Hiranyakasipu and Rāvana. Some of the best representations of Rāma occur in the South Indian bronzes. He is frequently represented as Kōdandarāma (Rāma with the bow). Krishna is represented as playing on a flute, or dancing on the heads of Kaliya, the terrific serpent that poisoned the waters of the river Jumna, or as Gōvardhanoddhāraka (lifting Mount Gōvardhana with his little finger), or as Navaneeta-Krishna (stealing, as a child, a ball of butter). Narasimha is usually depicted in the intensely dramatic situation of slaying the demon Hiranyakasipu. The best example of this is found in the Dasāvatāra temple at Ellora which is acclaimed as a marvel of creative ability and as one of the great masterpieces of Indian art. Vishnu's form as Trivikrama, which is a frequent subject of representation, is associated with his incarnation as Vāmana, the midget, who asked of the demon king Bali the gift of three paces of space. The king readily agreed, being of a very generous disposition, and the midget instantly grew into a colossus, sky-high and space-filling. With two steps, he covered the earth and the heavens and demanded of the astonished king space for the third. The king bowed low, bared his head and said, "Sire, make me thy footstool." Placing his foot on Bali's head, Vishnu pressed him down to Pātāla (the nether world) where, it is believed, Bali still rules. Thus by a clever ruse the unlimited sway of king Bali, the great enemy of the Devas, was brought to an end. Trivikrama means "the one who took the three steps." Vishnu, as has already been stated, is also identified with Āditya (Sun-God). The three steps correspond to the position of the sun at dawn, noon and at sunset. Several representations of Trivikrama show him as the upholder of the heavens measuring out space with one upraised leg. Of these the rock-cut relief of Trivikrama at Mahabalipuram is an outstanding example (Pl. XXIV). Trivikrama has usually eight arms which radiate from his body like rays. His rigid pose as the upholder of the heavens is axis-like and the left leg is raised sky-high in the act of measuring out space in its wide sweep.

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[19] Buddhism lingered in Bengal till about the 12th century.

SIVA

With the growth of the cult of Siva, a vast Saivite mythology was built up. He was conceived in various forms and an elaborate iconography came into being. This development is well reflected in the art of the mediaeval period, particularly in South Indian sculpture and bronzes.

Siva is the Great Yogi, the Supreme Ascetic. His abode is in Mount Kailasa in the sacred Himalayas. His head is covered with matted winding locks ; it would take ages to traverse them (Pl. XXI). This cosmic crown of Siva is adorned with the digit of the moon and the river Ganga. On his brow he has a third eye, which is symbolic of his yogic powers and his supernatural vision. It is also the seat of a terrific fiery power that burns and destroys. Siva is the Destroyer as well as the Regenerator of the universe. He is also Mahā Kāl or Time. At the end of the world cycle he destroys everything and all go back to him, the Primal Being. When he wills again, creation begins and then he becomes the many. The bull which is his mount is a symbol of his generative power and the serpent which adorns his body is indicative of the principle of re-incarnation or of ever-renewing life.[20] The serpent, it may be noted, has a habit of shedding its skin periodically and growing a new one.

Siva is also known as Mahādeva or Mahesa, the Supreme Being. This conception finds magnificent expression in the so-called Trimūrti image of the Elephanta caves, near Bombay. This is one of the great masterpieces of Indian art (Pl. XXVI). The head on the extreme left represents the *Aghora* aspect of Siva. The skull that adorns the head, the serpents with outstretched hoods intertwined with the matted locks of hair, the "lightning-like moustache" and the wrathful countenance proclaim that he is the Terrible One, the Destroyer. In the central head which dominates the composition, he is Tatpurusha the Great Ascetic, serene, majestic, sunk in contemplation, the Unfathomable and the Unknowable. The third head which is exceptionally beautiful is that of Vamadeva, the source of all Beauty. The citron fruit (full of seeds) which is borne in one of the hands is a symbol of the universe whose creator he is; "...deeply silent the triune head holds its mystery, vital and deathly on the left, knowing and blissful on the right, and free of any attributes in the face on the middle."[21]

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[20] "The serpent starts forth like a fountain from its hole and winds like a river, an embodiment of the water of life issuing from the deep body of the Mother Earth." —Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization*.

The various aspects in which Siva is conceived as a beneficent, boon-bestowing, teaching or destroying deity are known as *Līla-mūrtis* (his sportive forms). Siva and his consort Pārvati are regarded as the archetypal lovers. They are spirit and matter and out of their union the worlds are born. There are innumerable representations of their wedding where Pārvati is given in marriage to Siva by her father Himavan in the presence of all the sages and the gods and amidst universal rejoicings. In this aspect Siva is known as Kalyānasundara Mūrti. Siva was overwhelmed with the love and devotion of Pārvati and, therefore, it is said he decided to remain inseparable from her in body and soul. In this aspect he is Ardhanārīsvara, the god that is half-male and half-female, a symbolic conception of the inseparability of Siva and Sakti and of the male and the female principle. Whether in stone, metal or paint, the Indian artists have striven with success and exceeding skill to concretise this conception and to evolve a composite form of the male and the female that is artistically satisfying. On one side is expressed strength, vitality and the majesty of the masterly male and on the other the grace, the tenderness and the confiding intimacy of the female.

Perhaps the most widely known aspect of Siva is that of Natarāja, Lord of the Dance (Pl. XXXVIII). The whole cosmos is his theatre and his dance is symbolic of his five divine activities of creation, preservation, destruction, illusion and release.[22] Creation arises from the drum which is the symbol of vibration and is held in the upper right hand of the Natarāja figures. Protection is assured by the lower right hand which is held in the *abhaya* pose. The upper left hand bearing the flame indicates his destructive powers. The lower left hand points to the raised leg which gives release from all bonds. The leg that crushes the demon Muyalaka is the refuge for all tired souls that seek escape from causality. The encircling arch called the *tiruvāsi* or *prabhāmandala* which springs from the Natarāja images, represents Nature that is inert which Siva galvanises into activity. He dances with Fire, Water, Ether and Wind. "Dancing, he sustains the manifold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still dancing, he destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest." As Dakshinā Mūrti, another of his forms, he is the abode of perfect, imperishable wisdom, and as Bikshātana Mūrti, he is the Great Vagrant going a-begging, bowl in hand.

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[21] Stella Kramrisch, The Image of Mahādeva in the Cave Temple of Elephanta Island, *Ancient India, Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 2, July 1946.

Ganesa, the elephant-headed son of Siva and the leader of Ganas, the capering imps of Siva (Pls. XXII & XXIX B), is the Remover of Obstacles. His grace is the prerequisite for success in all undertakings. Therefore he is one of the most popular and widely worshipped of deities. His cult spread to several countries of East Asia. A very large number of Ganesa images are in existence both in India and in East Asia and several of them, both in stone and metal, are remarkable creations.

Reference has already been made to the principal goddesses Pārvati and Lakshmi. Representations of the goddess Durga (also known as Kāli—Pl. XL) frequently appear as Mahishāsuramardini (destroyer of the buffalo demon) a form in which she is worshipped widely in India. These invariably present animated scenes, portraying the destructive fury which the goddess embodies.

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[22] Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Shiva.*

4. Landmarks in Sculpture and Architecture

INDUS VALLEY ART

THE STORY OF Indian art is both long and exciting. Its earliest known phase belongs to the Indus Valley culture (3000-2000 B.C.) which was revealed by the discoveries at Mohenjo-Daro in Sind and Harappa in the Punjab.[23] Amongst the several finds unearthed are a large number of ivory and faience seals, *terracotta* and limestone figures, gold jewellery, coins, pottery and well-built and storeyed houses of burnt brick. These houses were situated in wide streets which were laid at right angles and provided with a developed drainage system. There were granaries for the storage of grains. Another distinguishing feature of its civic life was the public baths and these had ingenious devices for filling and emptying. The builders were skilled in town planning and were remarkably efficient in construction. The materials used were also of finished quality. All these indicate that the Indus Valley people were materially prosperous and also artistically inclined. The limestone statuettes, the *terracotta* figurines, the metal images and the effigies on the seals show the wide acquaintance of the Indus Valley artists with different media and afford proof of the fact that they practised in varied styles. The two well-known Harappa statuettes, one of red sandstone (Pl. I C) and the other of grey slate, are remarkable for skilled modelling, sense of volume and plastic sensibility. They are exquisitely finished. For a parallel to this magnificent achievement we have to turn to Greek sculpture of two thousand years later. Another important find is the Mohenjo-Daro bronze figurine of a dancing girl (Pl. I B). This is cast in the *cire perdu* or the lost-wax process which attests to the extreme antiquity of this technique in India. Thousands of years later, this art scaled a new peak of achievement in the Nepalese and South Indian bronzes. The figure of the dancing girl is characterised by wiry vigour and sense of movement. The somewhat intriguing pose of this ancient dancer with one arm on her hip is still met with in the various folk and classical dances of India. The Indus Valley seals are of exquisite craftsmanship (Pl. I A). Of the animal seals Prof. Benjamin Rowland, Jr. says that "they are amongst the world's greatest expressions of an artist's ability to embody the essentials of a given form in artistic shape".

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[23] Now in Pakistan.

It is interesting to note that several features of the Indus Valley art are found in the later art of the historical period. Nearly two thousand years separate these two periods and our present knowledge of the art of this intervening period is extremely limited. Nevertheless, some affinities that exist in the art of the Indus Valley and that of the historical period point to the continuity of certain art traditions from the remote age of the Indus Valley. The bull and the elephant so commonly met with in the Indian art of the historical period are also notable features in the Indus Valley art. Similarly, amongst the fauna the pipal (Bodhi tree) is found in the representations at Mohenjo-Daro. Dr. Stella Kramrisch points out that the easily carried bulk of the Harappa red stone statuette, the gliding bodily movement of the slate torso of Harappa and the glance directed towards the tip of the nose in yoga-like concentration and the summary treatment of the full cheeks met with in another group of figures of the Indus Valley are physiognomical features without which later Indian sculpture can hardly be imagined.[24] The treatment of the trees too, with their sinuous and swaying movements, is continued in later Indian art. In the motif of the tree bent into an arch and encompassing a figure found in an Indus Valley seal, can be traced the beginnings of the later halo or *prabhāmandala* around the divine and sacred figures which is a very common motif in Indian art. The multiplicity of heads and limbs meant to emphasise superhuman powers are already evident in the art of the Indus Valley. A cross-legged figure with worshippers on either side recalls, as Dr. Coomaraswamy has observed, later types appearing in Buddhist art. Further, "appearance, in the Western sense of an illusion" is also unknown in the art of the Indus Valley as also in later Indian art.

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[24] Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture.*

We have far too few sources from which to get a picture of the political conditions in India or of the artistic activities of the next two thousand years. All we know is that a revolutionary historical process of far-reaching significance set in with the arrival of the Aryans and their expansion into the Gangetic plain, which occurred about 1500-1000 B.C. and onwards.

MAURYAN ART

The next phase of Indian art of which we have some definite knowledge belongs to the historical period known as Mauryan (322-185 B.C.) during which the Mauryan dynasty was the dominant ruling power in India. After the collapse of the Greek power which was established in Northern India in the wake of Alexander's invasion, the Mauryan empire founded by Chandragupta Maurya extended from North to Central India. This was a period of great prosperity, increased trade and constant intercourse with foreign countries. The most distinguished ruler of this dynasty was Asoka (272-232 B.C.) who is recognised as one of the greatest figures in world history. He embraced Buddhism and actively patronised it. The intense Buddhist missionary activities that followed covered several countries of Asia. One of the greatest cultural movements that history records, it resulted in implanting Indian art, culture and religion in various countries of Asia.

What we know as the art of the Mauryan period is but the continuation of the earlier indigenous art of the country and the official court art which Asoka patronised. Centuries of practice in less permanent material like wood had preceded the achievement of this period which appears strikingly skilled and accomplished. The achievement of the Mauryan age is best exemplified in such remnants as the well known Besnagar Yakshi (Indian Museum, Calcutta), the Parkham Yaksha (Mathura Museum), the Didarganj Yakshi (Pl. II A, Patna Museum) and the famous Asokan capitals.

These standing stone figures of Yakshas and Yakshis are cast in colossal proportions and reveal high technical accomplishment as well as considerable plastic sensibility. Though heavy with their physical bulk they are stately, magnificent figures beautifully modelled. The treatment of the jewellery and particularly of the drapery which enrich the figures are notable features, for they are characteristics that distinguish Indian sculpture of all later periods, no doubt with varying emphasis. Even the thin transparent drapery which reveals more than it conceals is already evident as a convention at this very early date (see Parkham Yaksha). The court art of Asoka is best seen in the polished sandstone pillars erected by him and on which his famous edicts are engraved. They are often called Persepolitan columns because of their obvious relationship to the art of Persia. Remains of ten such pillars exist. The most striking feature of these pillars is their capitals with magnificent animal figures. The symbolism involved in these animal representations can be best understood from the Sarnath capital (Pl. IV B). Its abacus bears figures of an elephant, a horse, a bull and a lion which are considered as guardians of the four quarters. Over the abacus with animal frieze is the figure of the addorsed lions. It may be noticed that the addorsed lions are stylistically different in treatment from the animals on the abacus and that they reveal Persian influences.[25] The Dharma Chakra (the Wheel of the Law) was placed on top of the lions. The Wheel so placed was thus meant to signalise the proclamation of the Law in the four quarters.

The Rampurva Bull capital (Pl. IV A, now in the National Museum, New Delhi) is an extraordinarily impressive piece and easily one of the best specimens of animal sculpture. Sir John Marshall regards it as "unsurpassed by anything of the kind in the ancient world". The Asokan pillars are boldly designed, exquisitely moulded and finely balanced. They possess a lustrous polish that is evident

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[25] There are many common elements in Early Indian and Western Asiatic art with its Indo-Sumerian and Indo-Iranian background such as the winged lions, centaurs, griffons, tritons, animals formally posed in profile with head forward, facing or turned back, animals addorsed or affronted, animal combats and friezes; the sun-car with four horses, the bay wreath and mural crown, etc.—Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Indian and Indonesian Art.*

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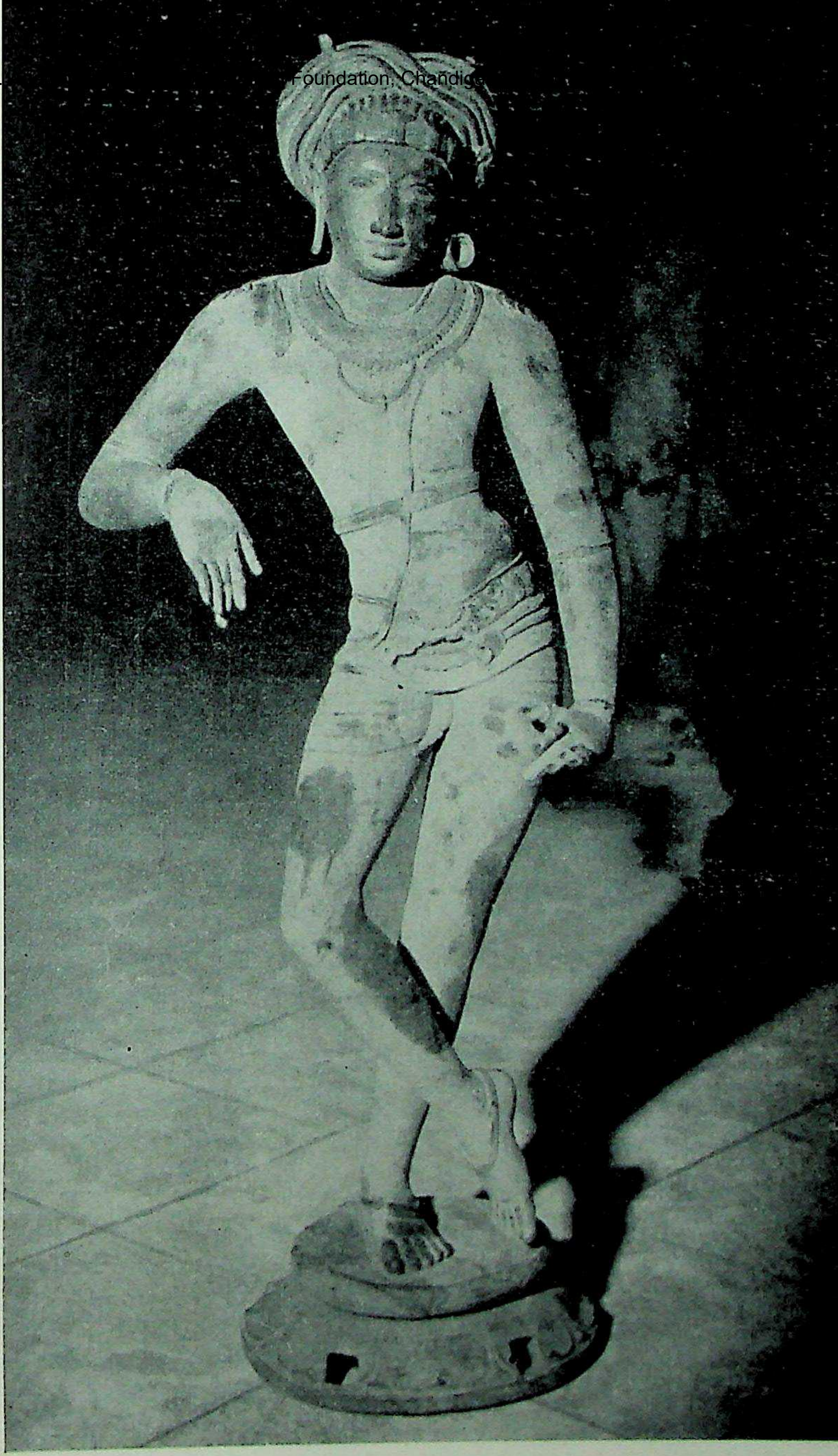
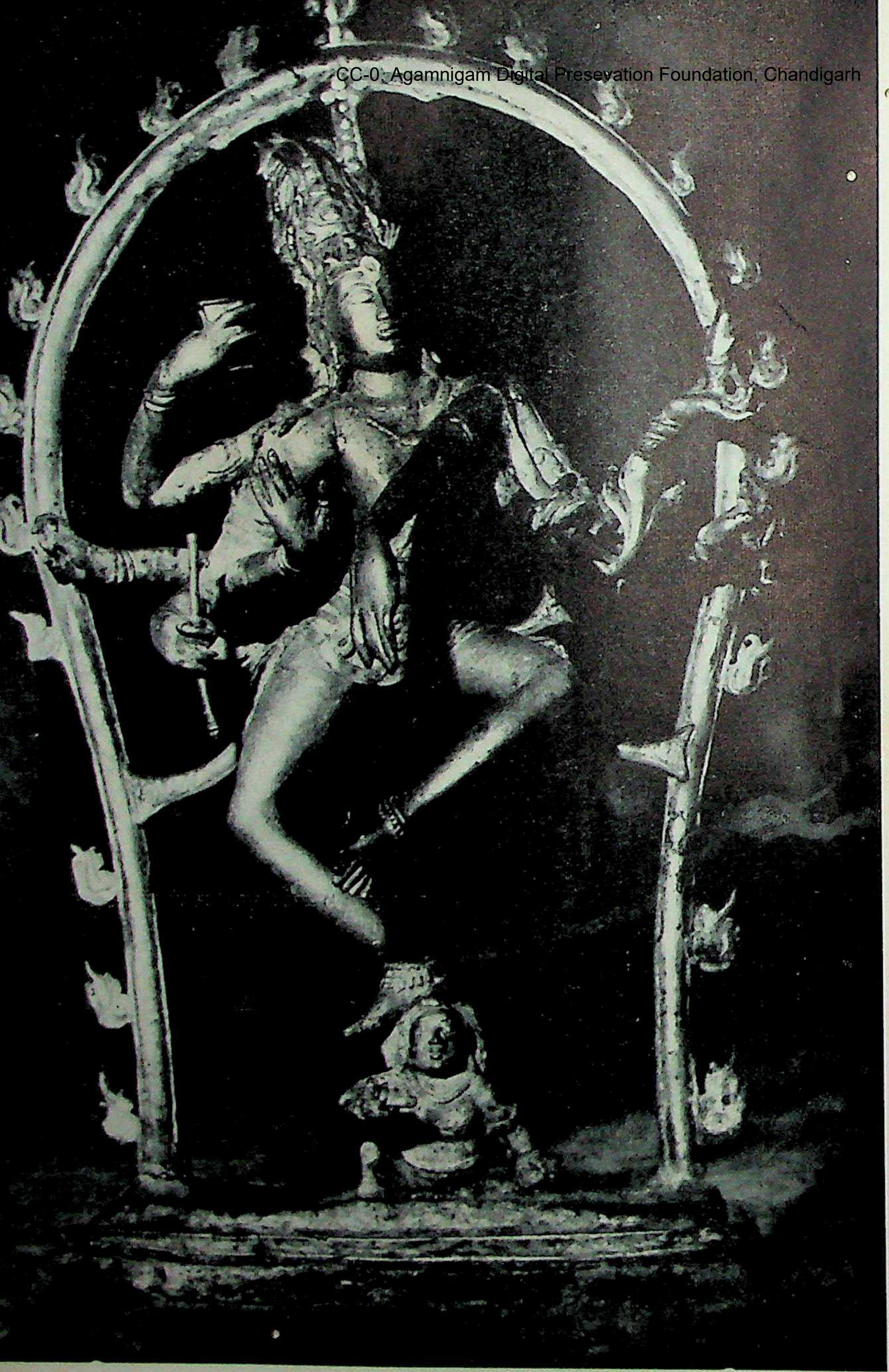


XXXVII. Siva as Rishabha-vahana (the right hand is in the position of resting on the back of rishabha, the bull mount of Siva), Bronze, 11th Century A.D.

Tanjore Art Gallery

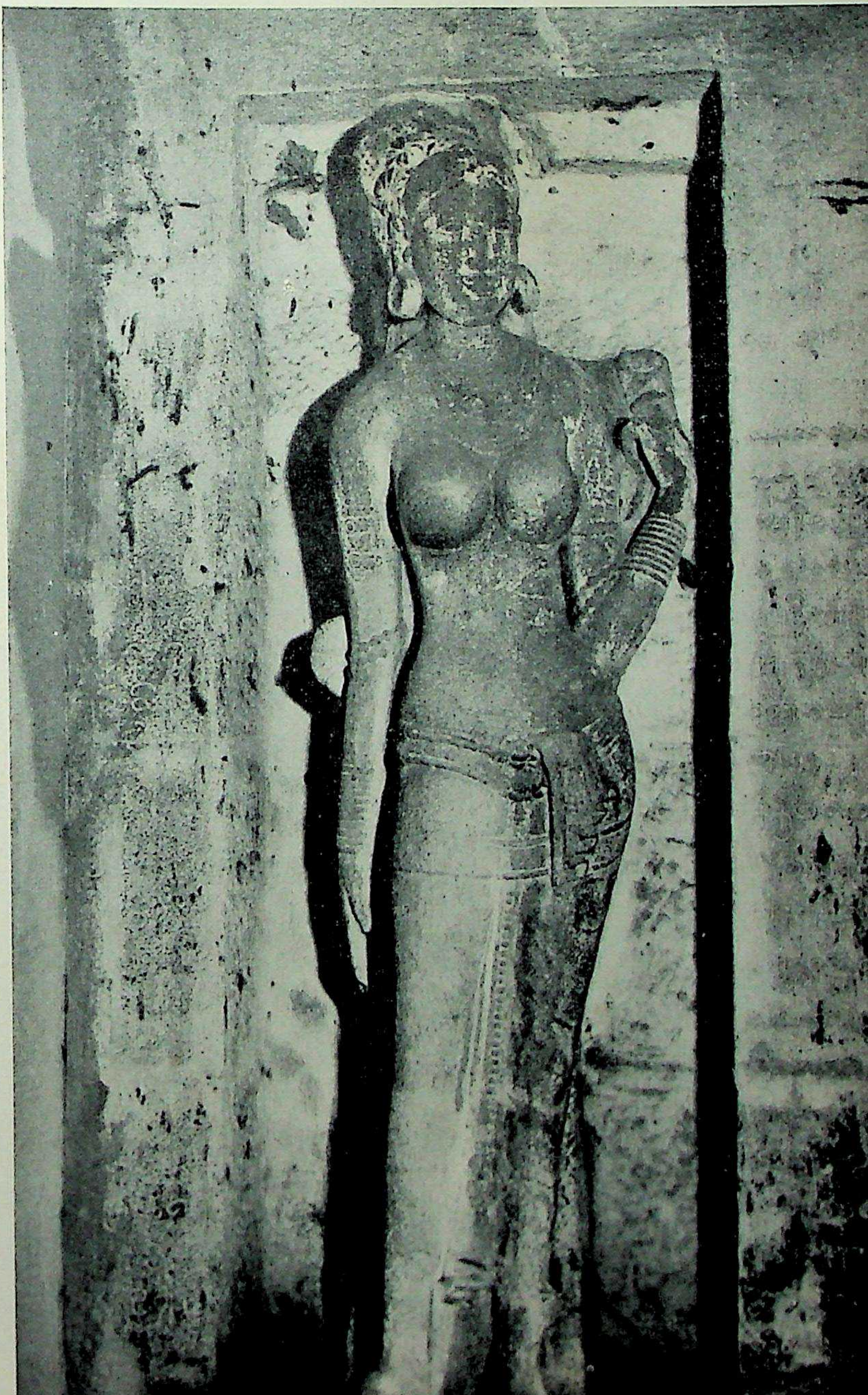


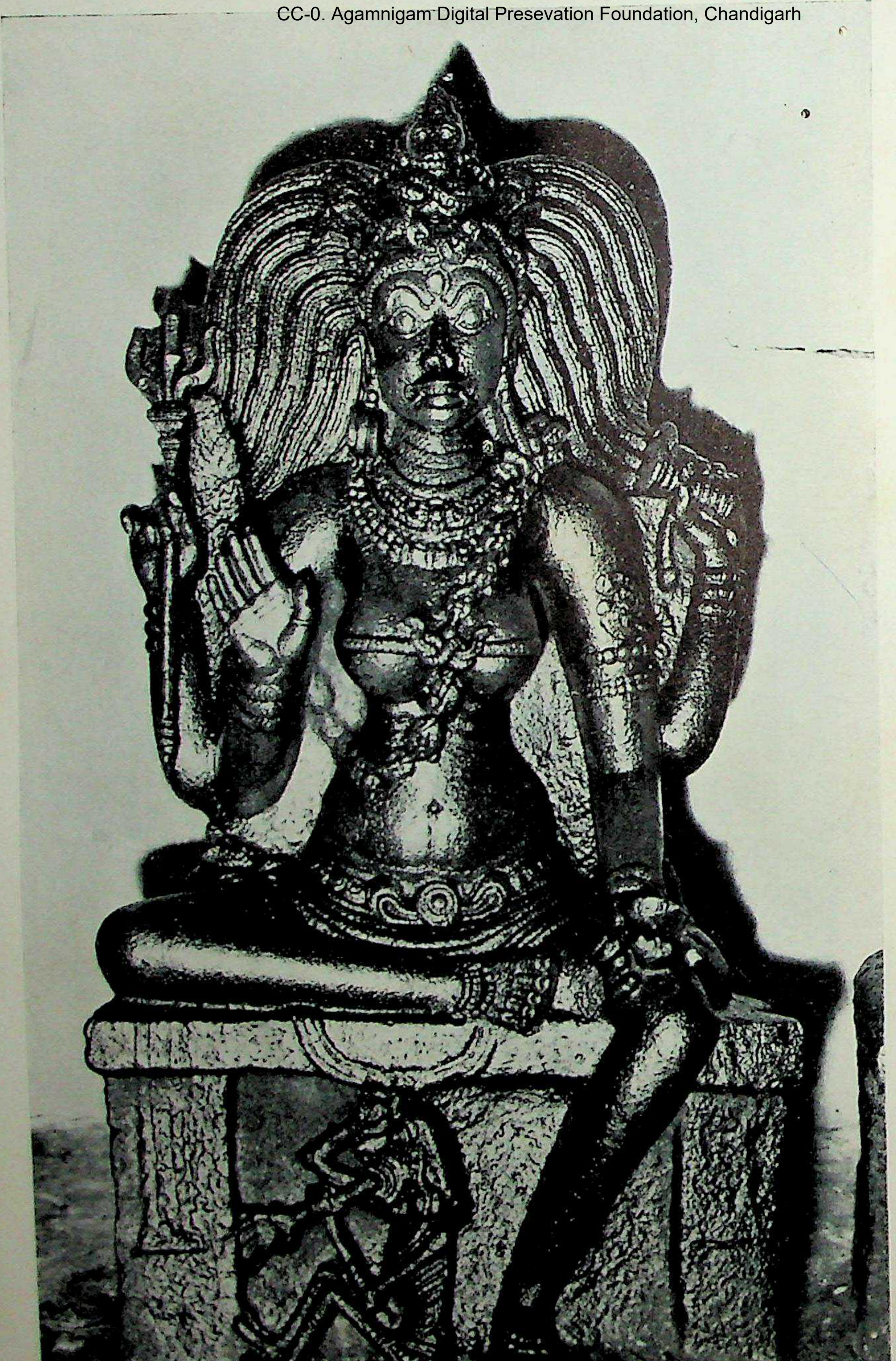
XXXVIII. Siva-Nataraja, Nallur Temple, Bronze, late Pallava, about 9th Century A.D.

LUCKNOW.

XXXIX.

Donor Lady, Nageswara Swami Temple, Kumbakonam, 10th Century A.D.





← XL. Kāli from Tiruttani Temple, 10th Century A.D.

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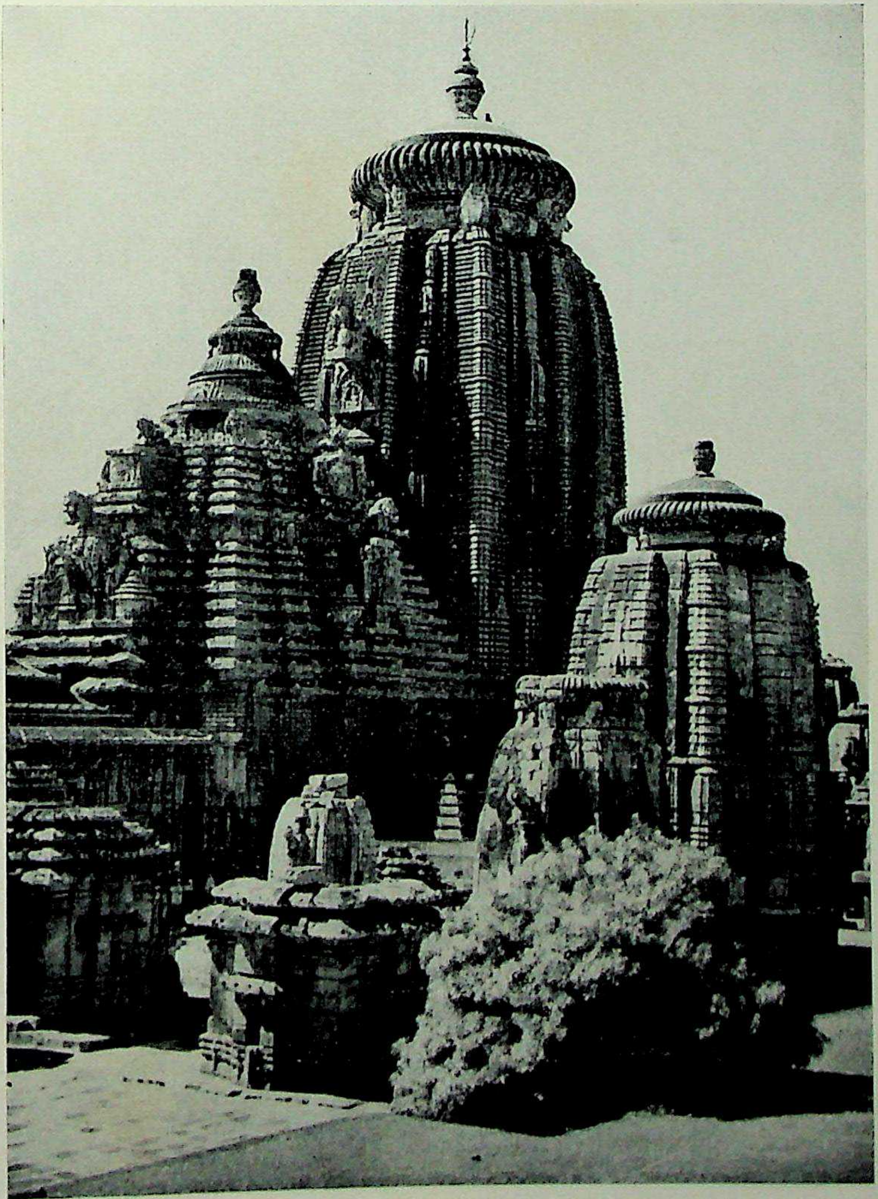
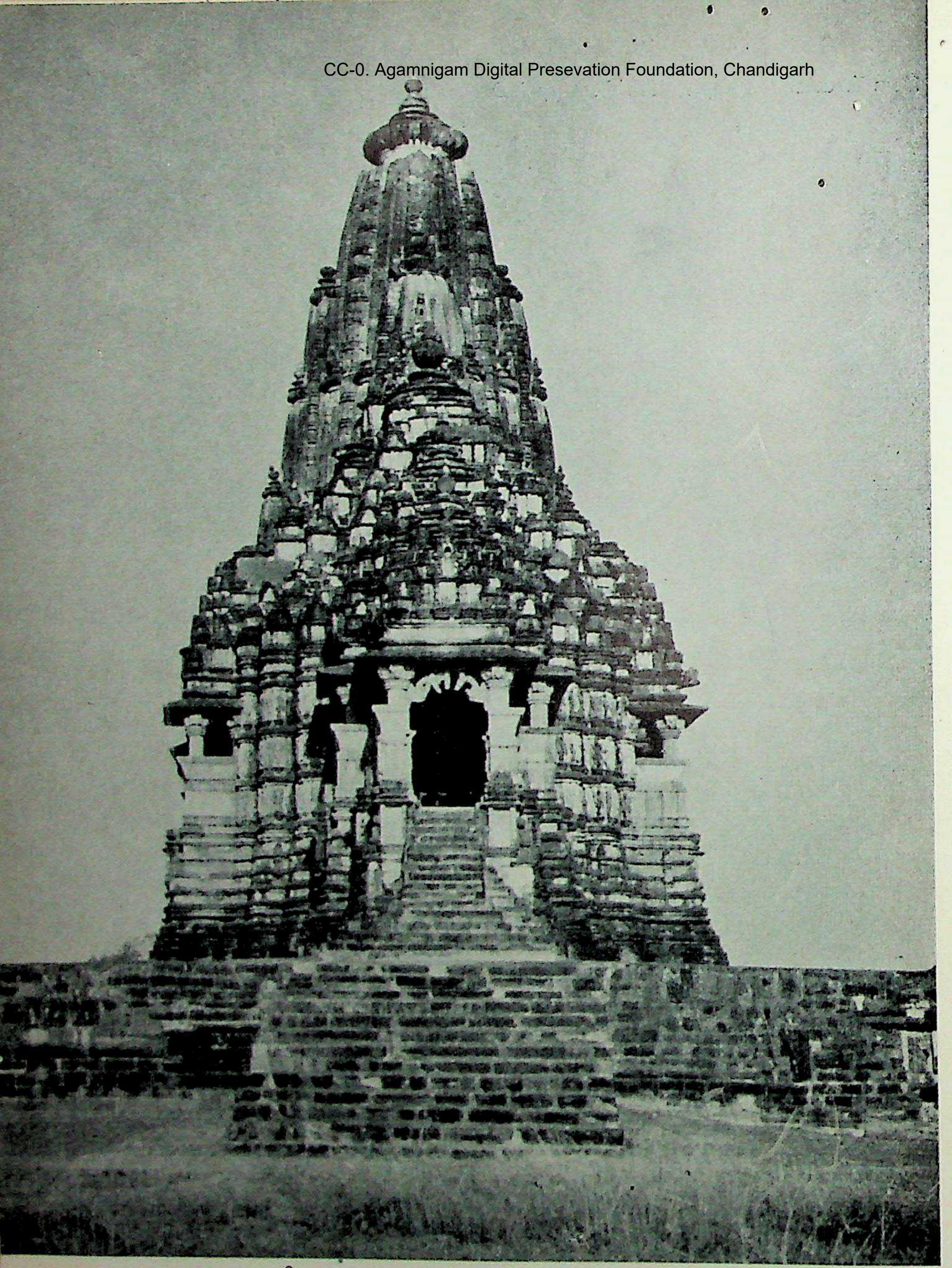
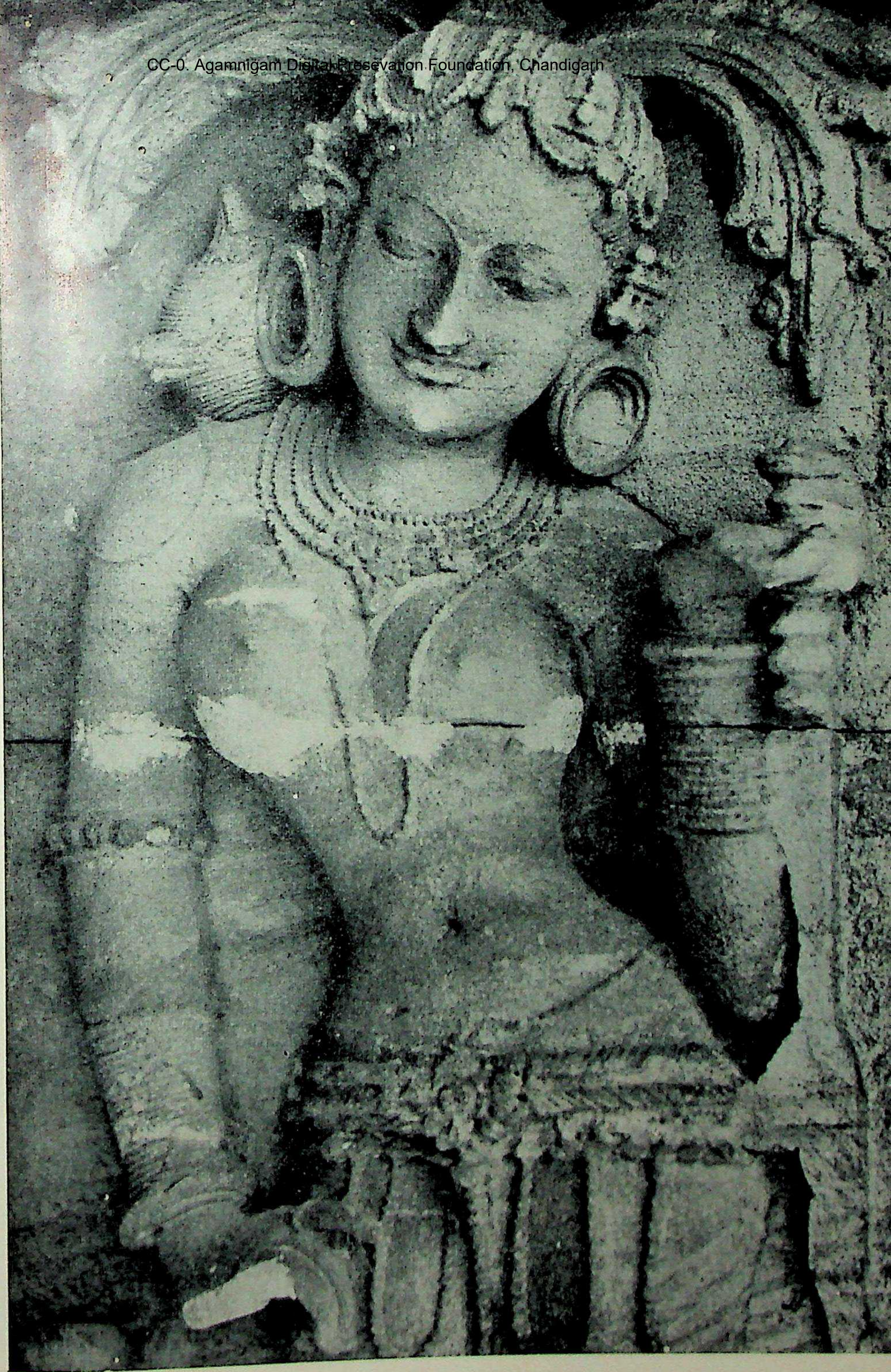
XLI. Lingaraja Temple, Bhuvanesvar (Orissa), 11th Century A.D.

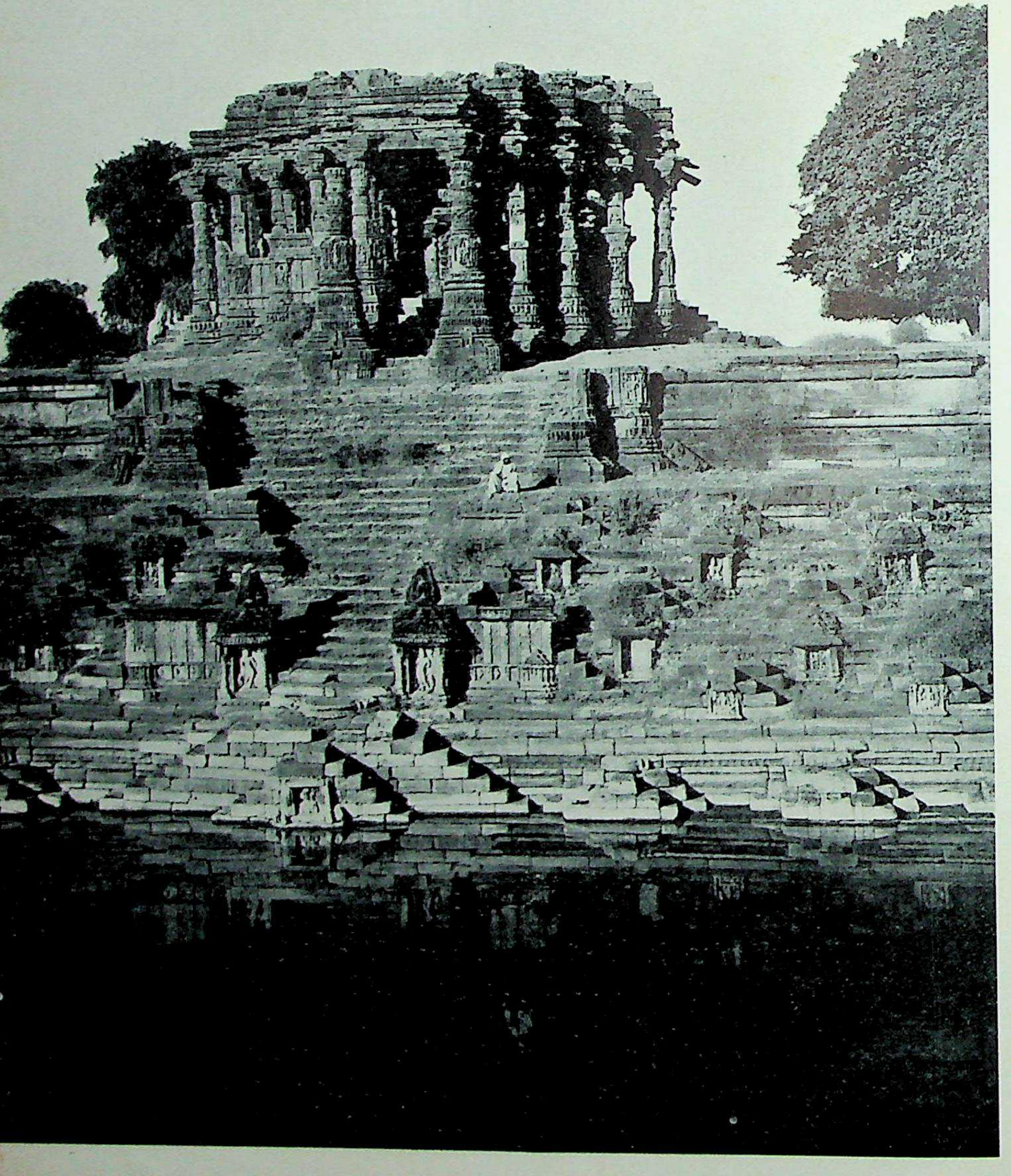




XLII. Kandāriya Mahadeva Temple, Khajuraho, 11th Century A.D.

XLIII. Sura Sundari from Lingaraja Temple,
11th Century A.D. →





XLIV. Sun Temple, Modhera, 11th Century A.D.

even today. Fa-hien, the famous Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the fifth century A.D., nearly seven hundred years later, noticed this remarkable quality and recorded with amazement that they "shine as bright as glass". Very different from all these is the figure of the sorrowing woman (Sarnath Museum) where, with the utmost economy, the intensity of grief is conveyed in a significant posture. Another interesting phase of Mauryan art as well as that of the following Sunga period is seen in the *terracotta* figurines which are found executed in an accomplished style (Pl. III). They disclose another fascinating sphere of Indian art the achievements of which need more comprehensive study and recognition than that accorded to it hitherto.

THE SUNGA PERIOD (200 B. C.—A. D. 20)

The Sungas succeeded the Mauryas as the chief ruling power in the north while in the south the Andhras held sway over a considerable part including the Deccan. The well-known stupas of Bhārhut and Sanchi and the early rock-cut shrines of Bhāja and Kārla on the Western Ghats and the *vihāra* at Nasik belong to this period. A few railings of the Bodh Gaya temple, some Mathura sculpture and the Gudimallam Siva *linga* which is an impressively powerful piece from South India are also assigned to this period.

In a study of early Indian art the importance of Bhārhut and Sanchi cannot be over-emphasised. Many characteristic features and iconographic types of Indian art are already evident in these early monuments. Though professedly Buddhist, there appears in them a preponderance of art motifs of pre-Buddhist and even non-Aryan India. What is seen is an animistic art with Yakshas (guardians of the quarters), Yakshis (dryads), Nāgas (serpents), all now taken into the fold of Buddhism (also into Brahminism and Jainism) and functioning not merely decoratively but also as *dramatis personae* in the legend narrated in the carved panels. The Yakshas and Yakshis were originally spirits and genii associated with trees, forests and lakes and were fertility spirits. In several panels at Sanchi and Amaravati Yakshas appear in association with elaborate vegetation motif; invariably a winding lotus rhizome proceeds from the mouth or navel of the Yakshas, which emphasises that they are fertility spirits. The Yakshis are frequently found with trees ; they are represented as holding the branch of a tree or standing with one leg entwined around a tree trunk (Pl. II B). This type of woman-and-tree motif (*vrikshaka*) characterised by graceful bodily flexion and sportive attitude is a pleasing and recurring theme in Indian art. These youthful figures of Yakshis are full and vital (Pl. II A). Certain important features of the female form in Indian art such as the full, firm and rounded breasts, the expanding hips—the general sensuous emphasis—are already perceptible in the Yakshi figures. This sensuous richness of the female figures was developed later with more conscious intent and as a significant convention to denote not only the grace and charm of womanhood but also to suggest motherhood, the essential role of woman. The emphasised breasts are the reservoir of youthful grace, the source of love and infinite tenderness and of abundant life. In the evolution of the significant forms the tendency to typify rather than to portray individual and purely personal features and qualities came into prominence.

These Yaksha and Yakshi figures are characterised, as pointed out by Dr. Coomaraswamy, by "a free and buoyant naturalism which is as yet untouched by the deep introspection" and the etherial elegance of form which Indian sculpture developed later as a deliberate style. In the evolution of the human and divine figures in Indian sculpture, these early images of the Yakshas and Yakshis have played an important part. Many of the panels at Bhārhut and Sanchi are devoted to the illustration of the *Jātaka* or birth stories of the Buddha (Pl. V A). They are marvels of decorative story-telling. Amongst the representations are animated royal processions with splendid pageantry, dancers and musicians, domestic scenes, lakes, rivers and boats, gardens, chariots, animals like the bullocks, stags, monkeys and elephants. Fergusson observes that animals represented here are better than in any sculpture in any part of the world and that the trees and architectural details are cut with an elegance and precision that are very admirable. Further, "the human figures too, though very different from our standard of beauty and grace are truthful to nature and where grouped together combine to express the action intended with singular felicity. For an honest purpose-like pre-Raphaelite kind of art, there is probably nothing much better to be found elsewhere." The main interest of the art of Sanchi and Bhārhut is life and it was inspired by a deep sense of humanism which shows an intense awareness of the unity of all life. This art, largely free from idealism and characterised by decorative phantasy, records the triumph of the popular tradition which was of the soil and full of vigour. This early phase gave to the enormous structure of Indian art its broad-based and well-grounded foundation.

MATHURA (100 B.C.—A.D. 600)

This school of sculpture occupies a unique place in the history of Indian art, for preserving and practising with skill the indigenous traditions for several centuries almost uninterruptedly. The products of the Mathura school are widely distributed and have influenced the development of several local styles both in India and abroad. The first purely Indian figures of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are believed to have originated in the workshops of Mathura. These figures were the models from which succeeding generations of artists drew their inspiration. The most outstanding examples of the Mathura school are the Bodhisattva figure of Friar Bala (Sarnath Museum), dated A.D. 123, the Katra Bodhisattva (Mathura Museum), the Jina of Kankali Tila (Lucknow Museum) and some images of the sun god Surya. The early products of this school, referred to above, are not markedly spiritual in expression; they have, as has been observed by Dr. Coomaraswamy, "physical means for their substance and sensual appeal as their aim". The Mathura finds have yielded several figures of Yakshis and others (Pls. IX, X & XIV A). Intimate scenes of daily life are depicted in panels where some women are found playing with children and birds, others are engaged in their toilet or are enjoying themselves playing ball, bathing in cool waters or are absorbed in bacchanalian revelry. It is so aptly said of them that whatever they do they do with charming naïveté, "stealing the hearts of gods and men alike". Their abundant youthful forms are radiant with happiness, the happiness of fulfilled women.

During Gupta period (350-650), Mathura workshops were humming with activity. The colossal head and standing image of the Buddha and the Vishnu figure exemplify the classic spirit at its best and are among the masterpieces of Indian art (Pls. XIII, XV & XVII).

GANDHARAN SCULPTURE (A. D. 100—400)

There is an exotic element in Indian art which has excited considerable controversy in the past as regards its contribution. This school of sculpture flourished in the Gandharan country which is roughly the North-West Frontier Province of undivided India (now in Pakistan) and included parts of Afghanistan. Peshawar, Taxila and Hadda were some of the chief centres of this school. Gandharan sculpture is the work of foreign craftsmen who practised in the Greek tradition and who happened to settle down in this region after the Greek invasion of India in 327 B.C. Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and later the Kushana kings ruled over this region. Probably this school of sculpture originated in 60 B.C. under Scythian rule and is Indo-Greek or rather Indo-Roman in parentage. The Kushana kings (A.D. 20-220) patronised Gandharan artists. The enormous output of Gandharan art which is largely devoted to Buddhist themes is the result of this royal patronage. Kanishka (A.D. 123-153) was the greatest in this line. His dominions extended from Afghanistan in the west to Bihar in the east. He embraced Buddhism and patronised it actively. He engaged a number of Gandharan artists to illustrate the *Jātaka* stories for edifying purposes. The output of this school was prolific. Several portrait sculptures of the Kushana kings, notably of Kanishka himself, and representations of Hindu and Jain subjects also form part of the work of this school. The momentum of Gandharan art weakened considerably after the fourth century A.D. and, with the destruction of Buddhism and Buddhist monuments of this region during the Hun invasions of the fifth century, this school of sculpture died out.

Though Indian in subject matter, Gandharan art was plastically foreign (Pl. XII). It did not materially influence indigenous Indian art. One particularly noteworthy feature of this school is the large number of representations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. The popularisation of the figure of the Master was not a little due to Gandharan art. It is believed that the Buddha and Bodhisattva figures were turned out in the workshops of Gandhara and Mathura almost simultaneously in the first century A.D.

AMARAVATI (3rd CENTURY A. D.)

There are extensive Buddhist remains in the lower Godavari Valley in South India at Guntapalle, Jaggayapeta, Nagarjunikonda, Amaravati and other sites covering roughly a period of five centuries from 200 B.C. to A.D. 300. Here flourished a great school of sculpture whose magnificent achievements are best known from the *stupa* at Amaravati which is ascribed to the period A.D. 150—200. The exterior casing of the imposing dome of this *stupa* was in white marble and was covered with exquisite bas-relief. An area of nearly 17,000 square feet was filled with sculpture. Side by side with the symbols that denote the presence of the Buddha, there appear innumerable panels devoted to the depiction of the *Jātaka* stories (in some of which the Master is represented in human form). Here are depicted many animated scenes like the mad elephant of

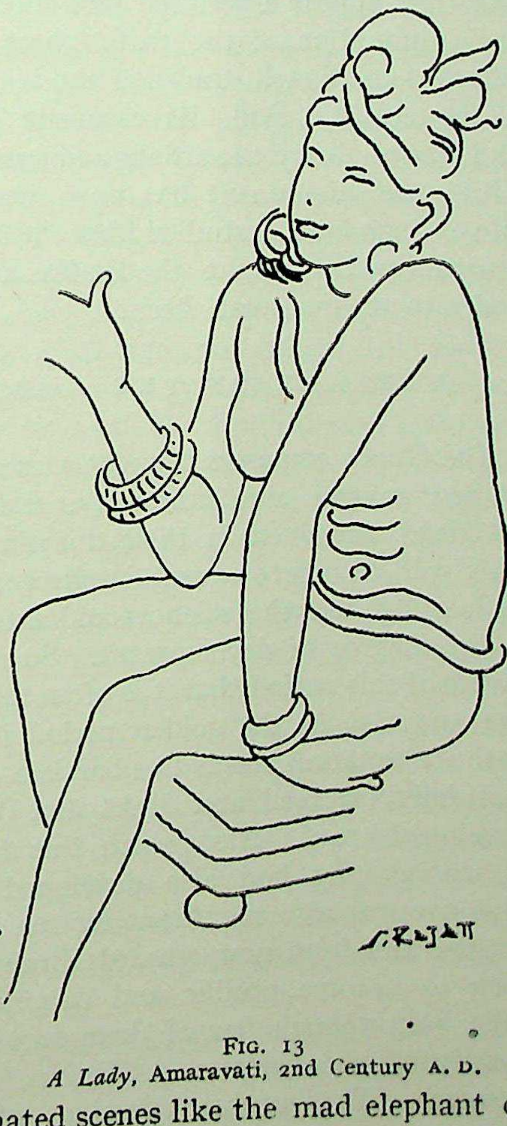


FIG. 13
A Lady, Amaravati, 2nd Century A. D.

Devadatta rushing through the streets of Rajagriha, the citizens of which run pell-mell in panic, or women kneeling in adoration and piety before a footprint of the Master. The passion with which these are told and the skill and mastery of form displayed in these reveal how much the people had identified themselves with the new philosophy and faith. The elongated and graceful figures of men and women of Amaravati are ever impelled by a rhythmic tension and they appear a god-like race (Figs. 1 & 13). Amaravati marks the culmination of the early phase of Indian sculpture of the Bhārhut and Sanchi tradition and is distinguished by the excellence of its technical skill, its exquisite and superior sense of beauty and, above all, by the ardour and passion evident in its articulation. This great monument has now completely disappeared from its site and can best be studied from the collections set up at the British Museum in London, at the Madras and Calcutta Museums in India and also at Amaravati itself.

THE AGE OF THE GUPTAS (A. D. 350—650)

The Gupta emperors brought a greater part of India under their unified control and suzerainty. Peace and material prosperity remained unbroken in their domains for nearly three centuries. This was an age of great intellectual expansion ; the study of philosophy and the sciences and arts, poetry and drama, reached a high degree of development. So remarkable were the achievements of this period that it is often referred to as the great classical age and also as the golden period in Indian history. Hinduism with its sectarian creeds like Saivism, Vaishnavism and Tantricism had fully emerged and Mahāyāna Buddhism was an elaborately developed creed. Along with this theistic development, the art of iconography had also developed with well-formulated rules. This age was also significant for the development of temple architecture and from now onwards Brahminic art comes into its own, soon to become prolific and dominant. Several Hindu temples were built though few of them survive. Amongst these may be mentioned the temples at Tigawa, Nachna, Dah-Parbatiya and Deogarh. The southern versions of this style can be seen in

State Museum,
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Kapoteswara and the Lād Khan (5th century A. D.). The early Gupta temples were small and flat-roofed as at Udayagiri (Bhopal) and the Lād Khan at Aihole (A.D. 450). The curvilinear spire makes its appearance in the Durga temple at Aihole (Pl. XIX) (A.D. 500), at Deogarh and elsewhere. This feature of temple architecture was an important development and soon became the dominant characteristic of the Brahminic temples contributing in no small measure to their impressive grandeur. Gupta temple architecture seems to have reached its culmination in the Deogarh temple. Its special features are the tower-like elevation over the *sanctum*, the arrangement of the pillared porticos and ornate doorways. The river goddesses Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, riding on their respective *vāhanas*, appear on the doorways as a new decorative feature, and this motif became a popular one. Caves XVI, XVII and XIX of Ajanta (Pl. XVIII) and the Visvakarma at Ellora are some of the other outstanding monuments of this period.

Gupta sculpture reflects the high accomplishment and refinement of the age. The Mathura and Sarnath Buddha images (Pl. XV), the Sultangunj copper image of the Buddha (the Birmingham Museum), the Sanchi torso of the Bodhisattva (the Victoria and Albert Museum), the Rāmāyana panels of the Deogarh temple, the Varaha of Udayagiri and the Nagaraja group in Cave XIX of Ajanta are some of the well-known masterpieces of this period. The artists of the Gupta period were more deeply interested in the human form than their predecessors; more graceful in proportion and more balanced than hitherto, the human form also expressed more profound spiritual values. The notable qualities of the art of the Gupta age have been correctly assessed by Coomaraswamy. "Gupta art is the flower of an established tradition, a polished and perfected medium, like the Sanskrit language, for the statement of thought and feeling. . . its character is self-possessed, urbane, at once exuberant and formal . . . . Philosophy and faith possess a common language in this art that is at once abstract and sensuous, reserved and passionate."

The influence of Gupta art not only spread over the entire subcontinent of India but also to all those countries where Indian religious and cultural influences penetrated and took root.

ROCK ARCHITECTURE

A reference has already been made to the rock-cut shrines of Bhaja and Karla, situated on the Western Ghats, which are monuments of great importance in the history of Indian art. Rock architecture constitutes so conspicuous a phase of Indian art that a little digression is necessary at this stage. The development of this phase of Indian architecture synchronised with the spread of Buddhism and the increasing need for *chaityas* and *viharas* (shrines and monasteries). It was the desire alike of the patron and the craftsman to rear enduring monuments to the glory of their faith, "lasting as the hills and rivers". Naturally, the qualities of rock attracted them. Its stability and durability were the very qualities needed to help perpetuate their work and their ambitions. The tough quality of the rock and the stupendous labour and cost involved in carving mountainous rock into shrines complete with pillared halls, niches, pilasters, cornices, living rooms, etc., all embellished with sculpture, called for the highest skill, daring, patience and, above all, devotion and piety. The passion to excavate the living rock which became noticeable in the Sunga period gathered momentum in the succeeding centuries and lasted till the tenth century A.D. During this time nearly 1,200 caves were excavated; most of them are Buddhist, others are Hindu and Jain. The earliest ones were excavated between the third century B.C. and the second century A.D. and belong mostly to the Hīnayāna phase of Buddhism. Generally speaking, the rock-cut temples of this period are cruciform in plan, having a pillared hall with a *stupa* at the apsidal end, leaving enough space for circumambulation of the *stupa*. The best example of this early phase of rock architecture—and one of the finest monuments in India—is the *chaitya* at Karla (1st century A.D.) on the Western Ghats in the Bombay State (Pl. VII). It has an impressive facade, distinguished by the large horse-shoe window and panels of robust and striking statuary and a noble hall with pillars and vaulted roof. The pillars in the excavated shrines have little functional role; though they bear no weight they appear as an integral part of the architectural scheme. At Karla the pillars are set close to each other. A great deal of the craftsmen's skill was

Pl. XLV. Head of Parsvanātha, 12th Century A.D. →

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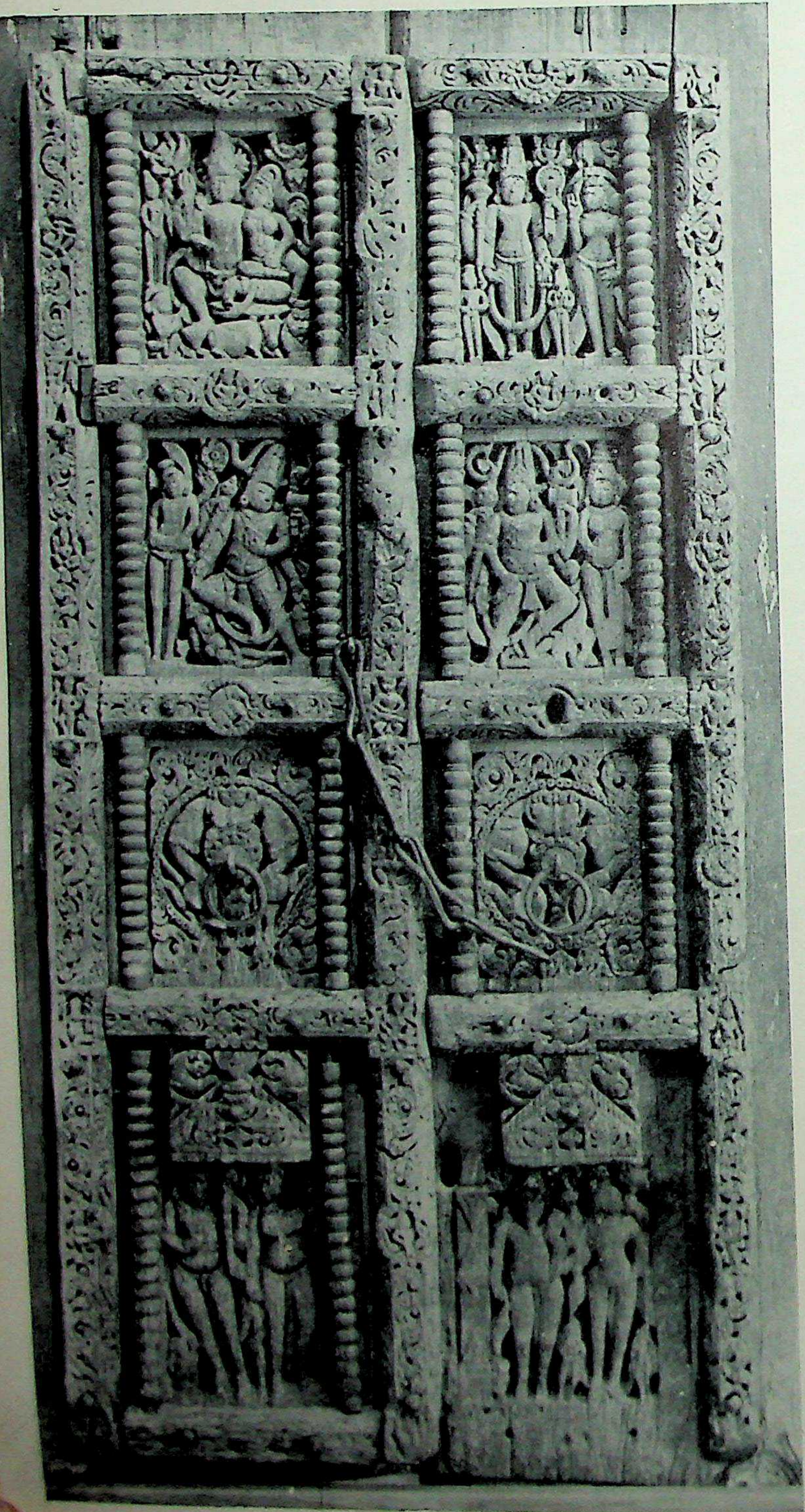
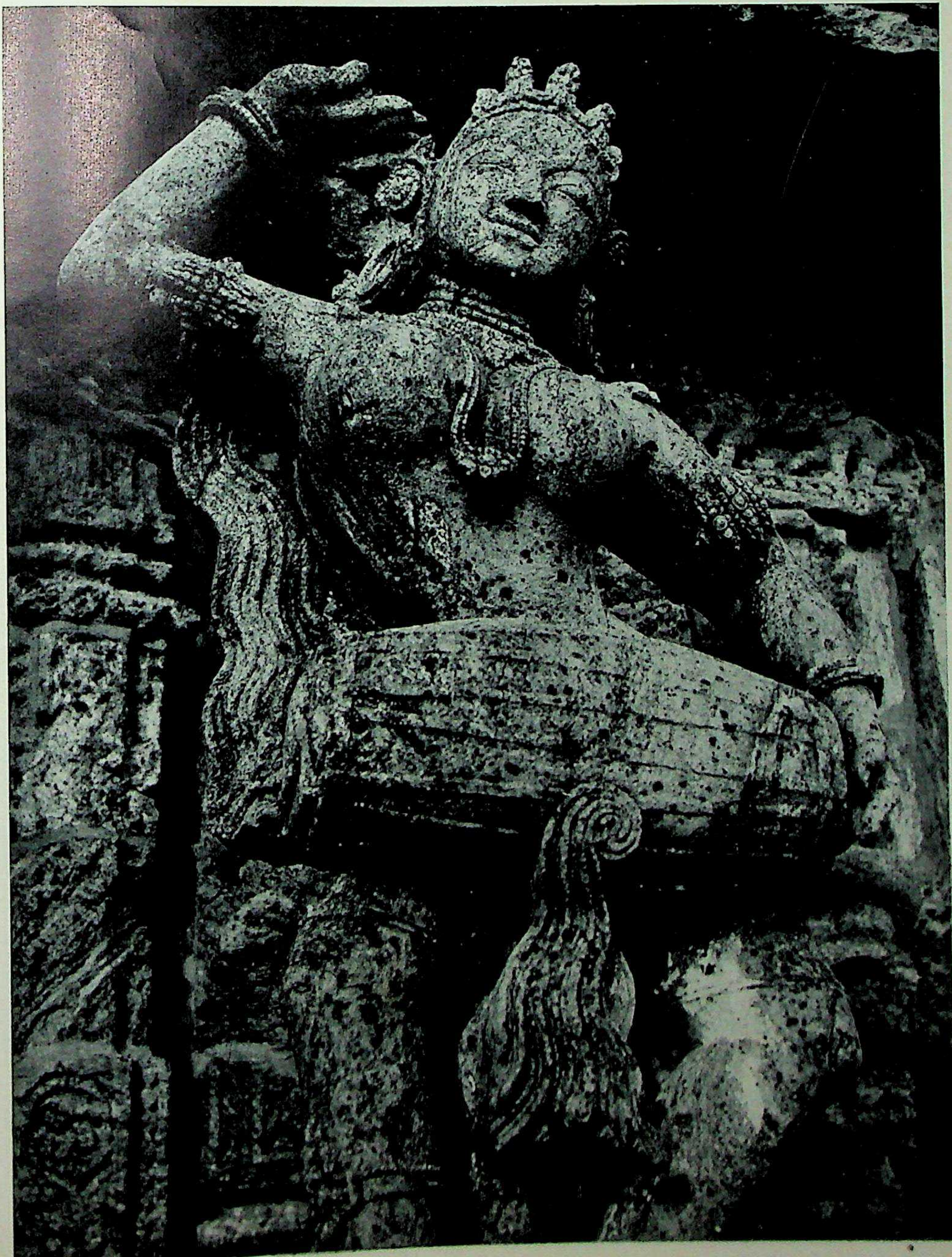


XLVI. Carved wooden doorway from Uttar Pradesh, medieval

National Museum of India, New Delhi

XLVII. Drummer, Konarak, 13th Century A.D.



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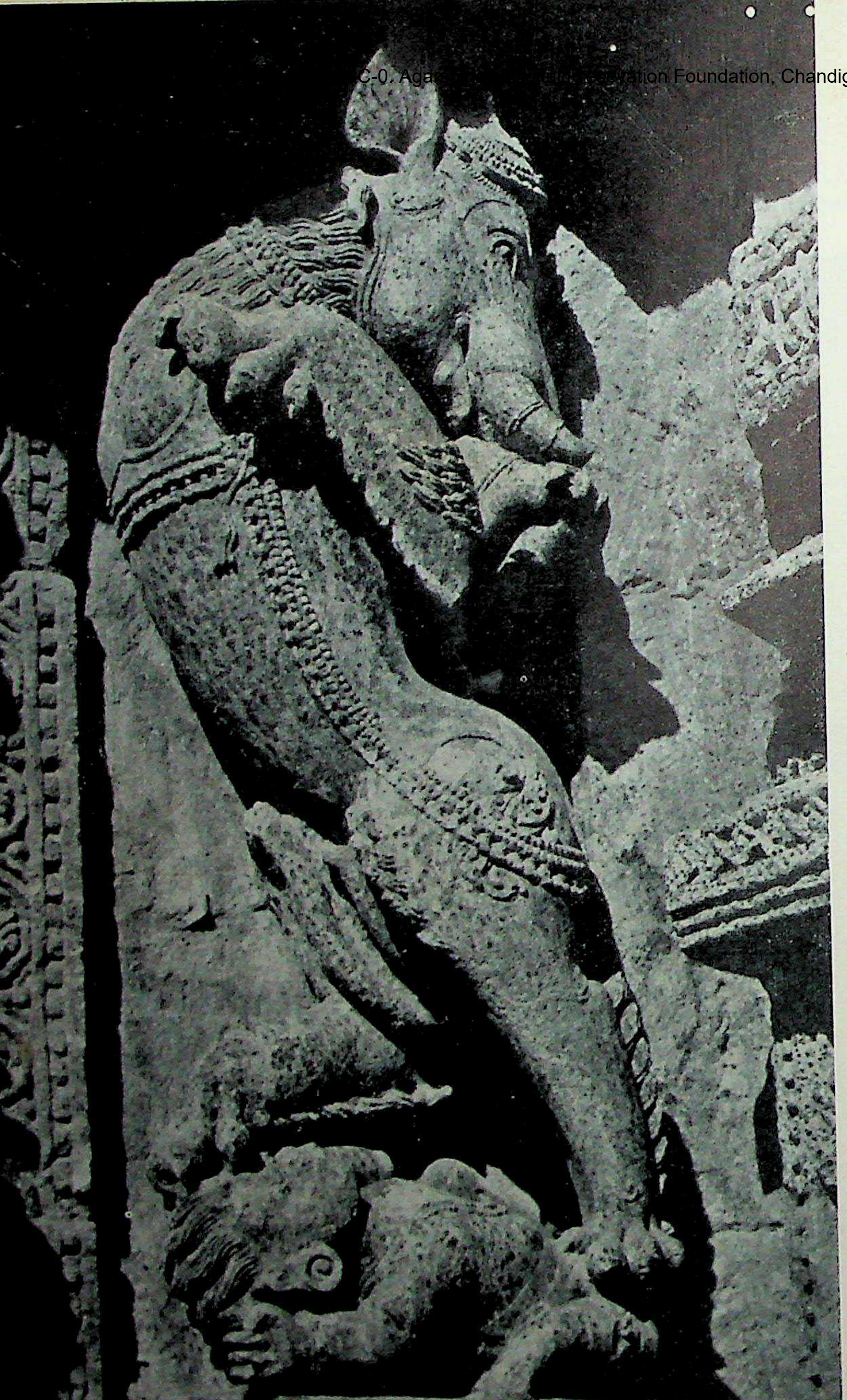
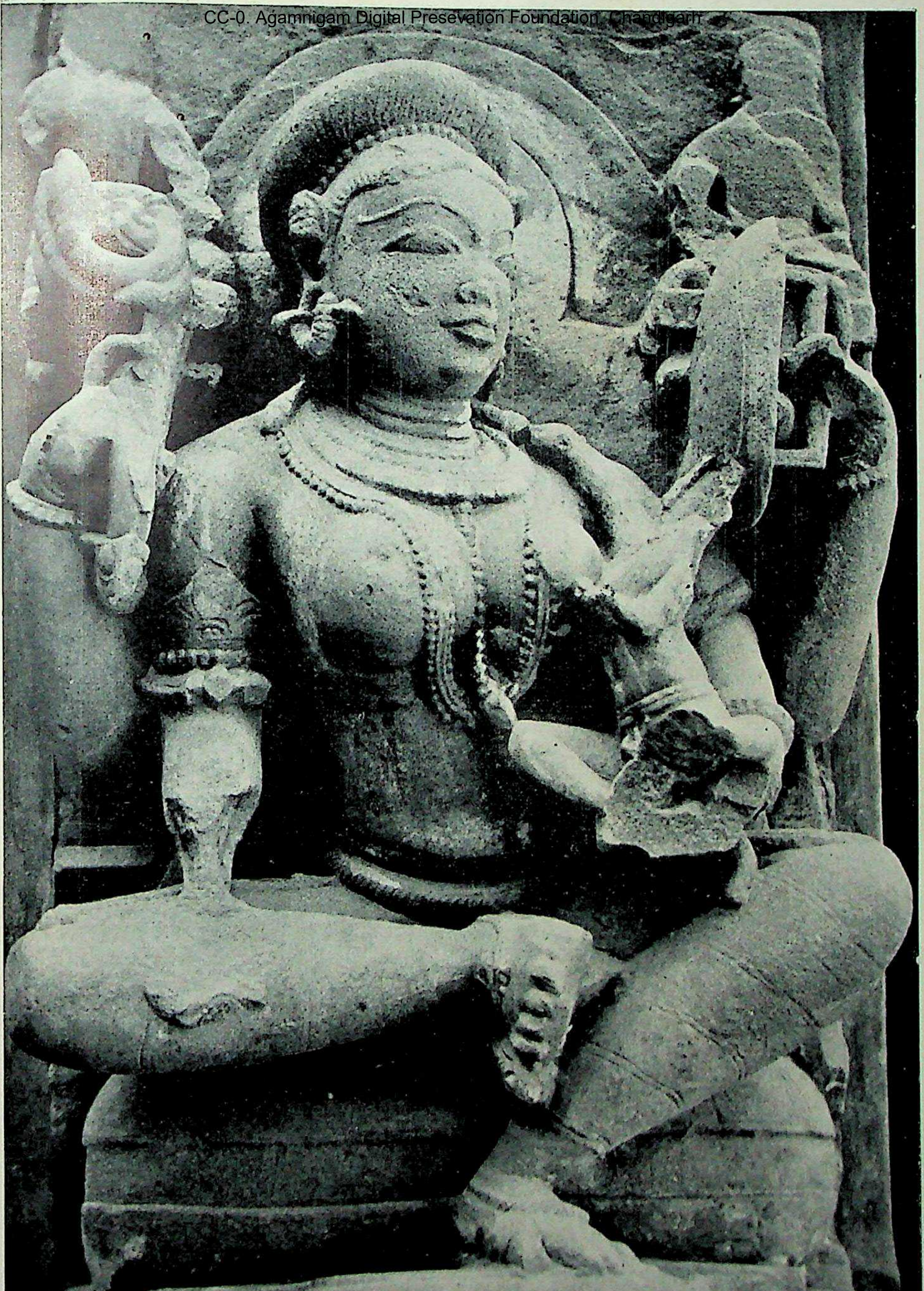


XLVIII. Gaja-Sārdula (elephant-tiger, composite animal form), Konarak,
13th Century A.D.



XLIX. Parvati, with child at her breast, looking into a mirror, 11th Century A.D.

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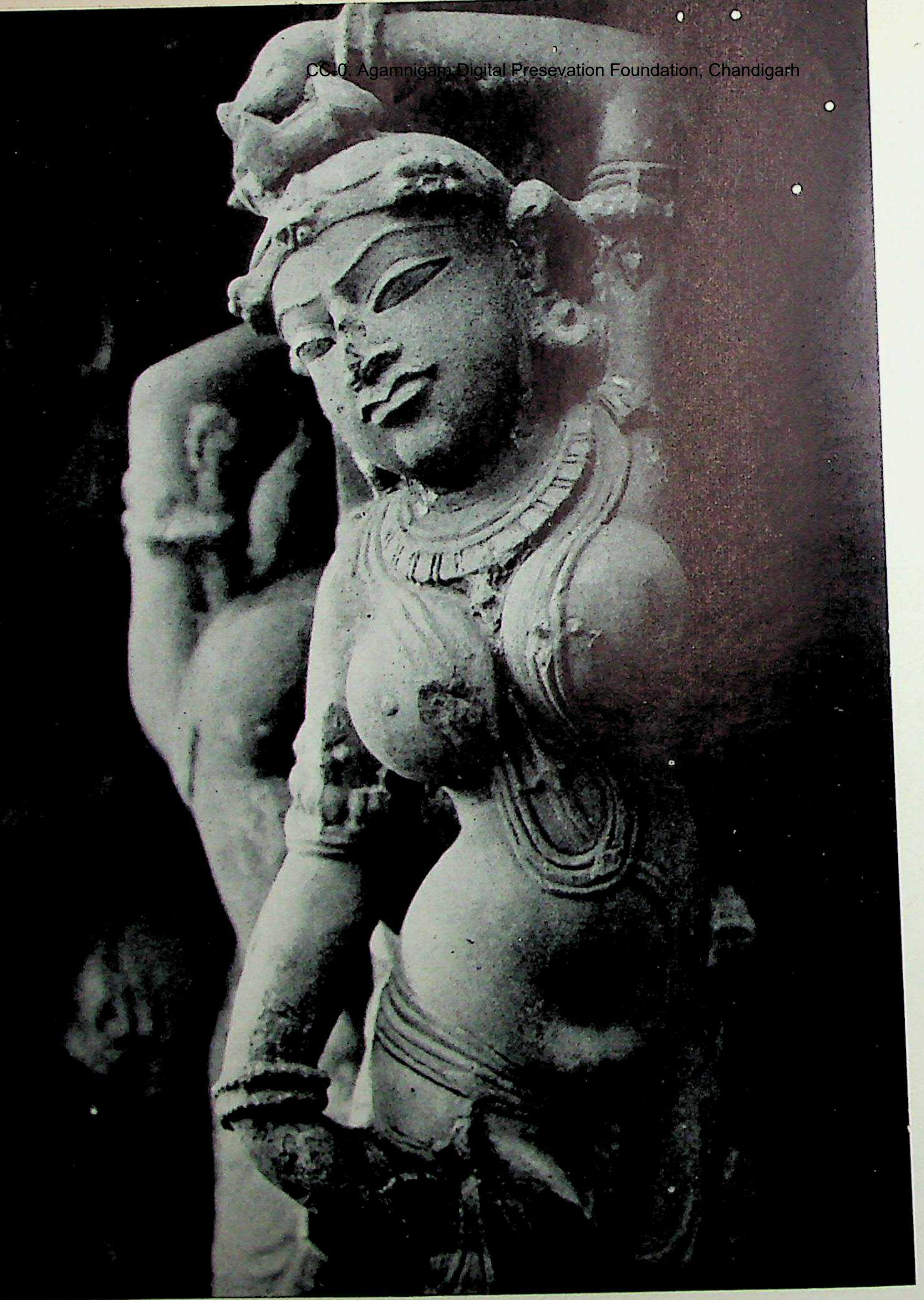

L. An Apsara from Ādinatha Temple, Khajuraho, 11th Century A.D.

LI. Detail from Luna Vasahi, Mount Abu,
13th Century A.D. →

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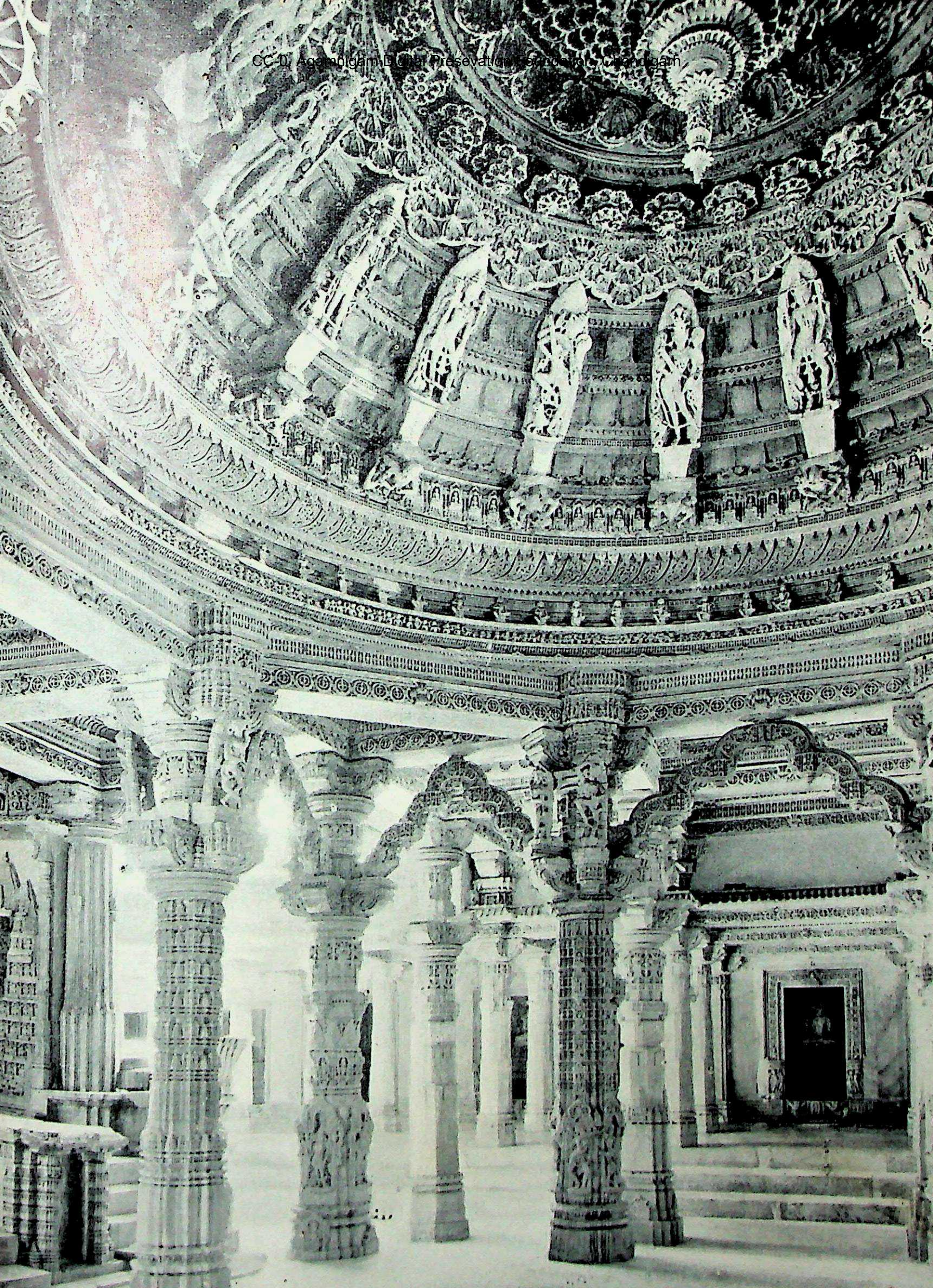
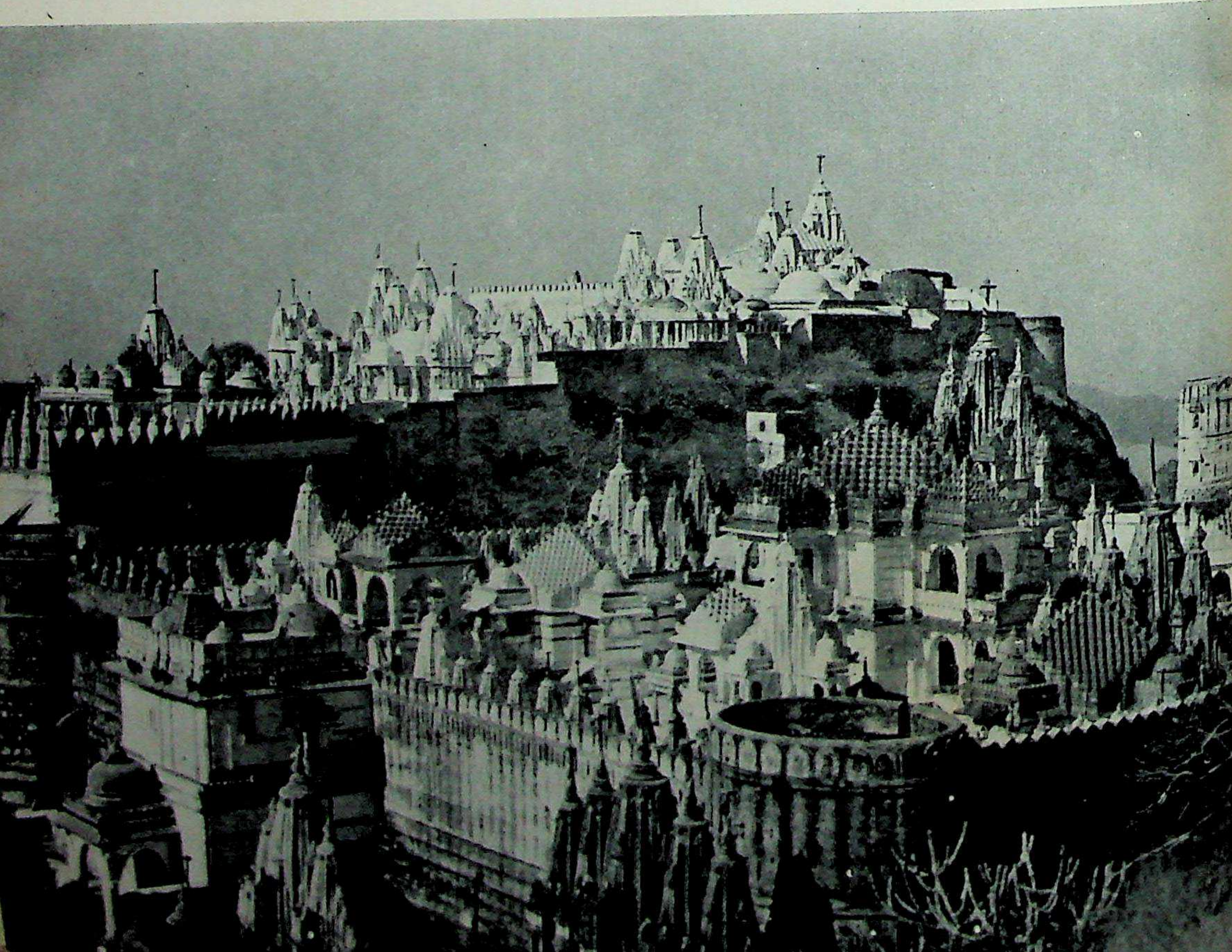


LII. Jain temples of Palitana, 16th-17th Century A.D.



expended on these pillars and they still retain their fine glistening polish. During the succeeding centuries the treatment of the pillars received increasing attention. The pillars in Cave No. XIX at Ajanta (Pl. xviii), at Badami (6th century) and at Dumar Lena in Ellora (7th century) are remarkable for their elegance and decorative effect.

After a lull from the third century onwards, the second phase of rock architecture was ushered in in the fifth century. This lasted till the tenth century. This was the most glorious period in the history of rock architecture. Enriched by the experience of the past and stimulated by the expanding needs of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, rock architecture entered into its most creative phase and rose to great heights. The Mahāyāna cave temples of Ajanta and Aurangabad, the *mandapas* and *rathas* of Mahabalipuram, the Elephanta, the Dumar Lena, the Visvakarma, Ravan-ki-Khai, Das Avatar and the Kailasa at Ellora mark the great achievements of this last phase of rock architecture. With an assurance born of mastery, the Indian craftsmen "worked like Titans and finished like Jewellers". The plastic sense displayed in these great works is of the highest quality. It is no longer architecture. Here is sculpture on a colossal scale, far beyond the wildest conception of the most daring sculptor of any age. "No other people," exclaimed Roger Fry, "has ever dreamed of sculpting such great temples out of the solid rock as he [the Indian craftsman] has." Freed from the inhibitions of the Hīnayāna, the Mahāyāna shrines contain several figures of the Master, some of colossal proportions. Another tendency was to convert the *viharas* into monasteries-cum-shrines. The large *chaitya* window gradually became smaller and the facade noticeably different. Verandahs with prominent pillars became a feature. The change in styles can be best studied at Ajanta which has a notable array of 29 rock-cut *viharas* and *chaityas*, some of them containing the most magnificent picture gallery in the world.

With the creation of the rock-cut temples of the 7th and 8th centuries rock architecture reached its full maturity and surpassed all its former achievements. The creative achievement of this period is best exemplified in the daringly original productions at Mahabalipuram, Elephanta and Ellora. All these temples are adorned with exquisite sculpture. The most noticeable feature of these is that they are imitations in rock of structural temples.

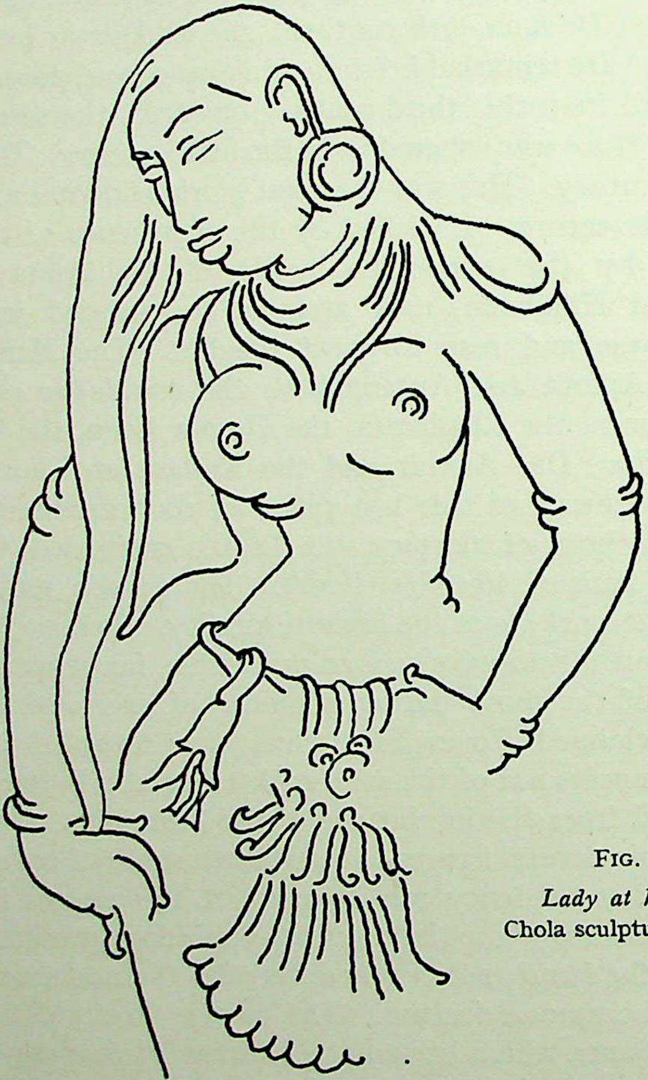


FIG. 14
Lady at her toilet,
Chola sculpture, Tanjore

One can easily follow the evolution of this style from the *rathas* and *mandapas* of Mahabalipuram and from the varying types that quickly emerged as at Elephanta and at Ellora to culminate in the Kailasa, the most ambitious and stupendous undertaking in rock-cut architecture (Pl. xxx). This is a complete imitation of a structural temple in all its details. By digging a trench on the three sides of a hill, cut to the level of the base, a huge mass of rock 200 feet long and 100 feet wide and 100 feet high was isolated. Beginning at the top, the craftsmen with unerring precision and great skill cut down this mass into a temple, as if it were built from the base upwards, with details, such as pilasters, cornices, niches, pillars, porticos, halls and accessory shrines, all embellished with abundant and superb sculpture. The temple stands on a plinth 25 feet high, adorned with an imposing frieze of elephants and lions, conveying the impression that they are caryatids bearing the whole burden of the enormous shrine. To quote Percy Brown again: "The temple of Kailasa at Ellora is not only the most stupendous single work of art executed in India, but as an example of rock-cut architecture it is unrivalled." Though rock architecture was practised in Achaemenid Persia, ancient Egypt, Greece and Assyria, in none of these, as Percy Brown points out, did the rock cutter reach so wide a range or show such audacity and imaginative power as in India.

EARLY MEDIAEVAL PERIOD (7—10th CENTURY)

The Gupta age witnessed the ascendancy of Hinduism—a movement which gained greater momentum in the succeeding centuries—and Buddhism practically died out in India by about the 9th century. The period from the seventh to the tenth century is often referred to as the Early Mediaeval Period. This was an age of transition when the traditions of the Gupta period were gradually changing and acquiring new characteristics. These three centuries are notable for the magnificent achievements under the Chalukyan, Rastrakuta and Pallava dynasties of the Deccan and the South. It is during this period that the three distinct styles of architecture emerged with their distinctive features. The Northern style is distinguished by its bold curvilinear spire, the Southern by its imposing terraced pyramidal tower (Pls. XLI, XLII & LIII). The third, generally speaking, is a combination of these two styles with certain other marked features which developed in the Kannada country (Pls. XX & XXXIII).

CHALUKYAN AND RASTRAKUTA PERIODS

The Chalukyas (A.D. 450 — 650) were a great power in South India and ruled over parts of the Deccan and the Andhra country until the middle of the seventh century when they were overthrown by the Rastrakutas (7th-10th Century). The temples of Aihole (Pl. XIX), Pattadakal (Pl. XX), Badami and the Ajanta Caves Nos. I—V and XXI—XXVI as well as the shrines at Ellora, Aurangabad and Elephanta were executed during this period. The Chalukyan and Rastrakuta structural temples effected a combination of the Northern and Southern styles. This style reached its climax in the well-known twelfth century temples of Somnathpur, Belur and Halebid in Mysore which are notable for their extremely ornate and florid style (Pls. XXXIII & XXXIV). The Virūpāksha and the Mallikarjuna temples of Pattadakal owe much to Pallava influence; in fact the Virūpāksha was modelled on the Kailasanatha at Kānchīpuram. And here, more than at Badami and Aihole, Chalukyan art is at its best.

The Dasāvatāra and the Dumar Lena, the Kailasa and the Elephanta—to which reference has already been made—are not only some of the finest examples in rock-cut architecture but are also remarkable for the excellence of their sculptural wealth. Rāvana shaking Mount Kailasa (in the Kailasa temple at Ellora), and Narasimha slaying the demon Hiranya (in the Dasāvatāra at Ellora) are unsurpassed for their compositional and dramatic qualities and are rightly acclaimed as great creations of the Indian artistic genius. Of the mature achievement of Rastrakuta sculpture Elephanta (near Bombay) remains a shining example. Almost every panel in its colonnaded hall is a great and inspired masterpiece. But the triune head of the Mahesamūrti, popularly known as Trimūrti, outshines all others, both in the grandeur of its conception and the excellence of its sculptural qualities (Pl. XXVI). It is the work of a supreme genius and fully embodies the essence of resurgent Brahminism which in its strident march had established itself firmly throughout the country.

PALLAVA ART

The Pallavas were the paramount power in South India for nearly three centuries from A.D. 600 to 900. They had their capital at Kānchīpuram. The Pallava rulers were great patrons of art and something of the departed glory of the Pallava empire still lingers in the noble fanes of ancient Kānchīpuram and Mahabalipuram. The architectural activities of the Pallavas cover two distinctive phases, one rock-cut and the other structural and in both these they have left magnificent monuments. The first phase is wholly devoted to rock-cut architecture and is best exemplified in the *mandapas* and *rathas* of Mahabalipuram (near Madras). *Mandapas* are excavated halls with pillars and pilasters which serve as framework for innumerable sculptured figures that adorn these fanes. The most important of these are the Varaha, Trimūrti and the Durga *mandapas*. The *rathas* are monolithic shrines carved out in imitation of structural temples. The *rathas* are named after the Pāndavas, heroes of the *Mahābhārata*. In these *rathas*, which are particularly noteworthy for their elegance, are preserved some of the oldest Dravidian architectural features. The second phase consists of structural temples, the most important of which are the Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram, which has withstood the ceaseless buffetings of the Bay of Bengal for nearly a thousand years, and the great temples of Kānchīpuram, the Kailasanatha and the Vaikunta Perumal. Important features of the Dravidian temple are already evident in these Pallava shrines. Particularly noticeable is the pyramidal tower of the Vaikunta Perumal which in subsequent centuries developed into the most distinctive architectural feature of South Indian temples. Pallava sculpture is seen at its best in the famous panels in the various *mandapas*. Amongst these Vishnu is depicted as Anantasayin, resting on his serpent couch of eternity, as Trivikrama taking a colossal stride (Pl. XXIV), Krishna as Gōvardhanōddhāraka (lifting Mt. Gōvardhana) and Durga slaying the buffalo demon Mahishāsura. All these have been acclaimed as great masterpieces. More impressive is the enormous open-air rock-cut sculpture called Gangāvatarana[26] (Descent of the Ganges) measuring 96 feet by 45 feet. It is a vast epic in stone and represents the highest achievement of Pallava sculpture. The skilled represen-

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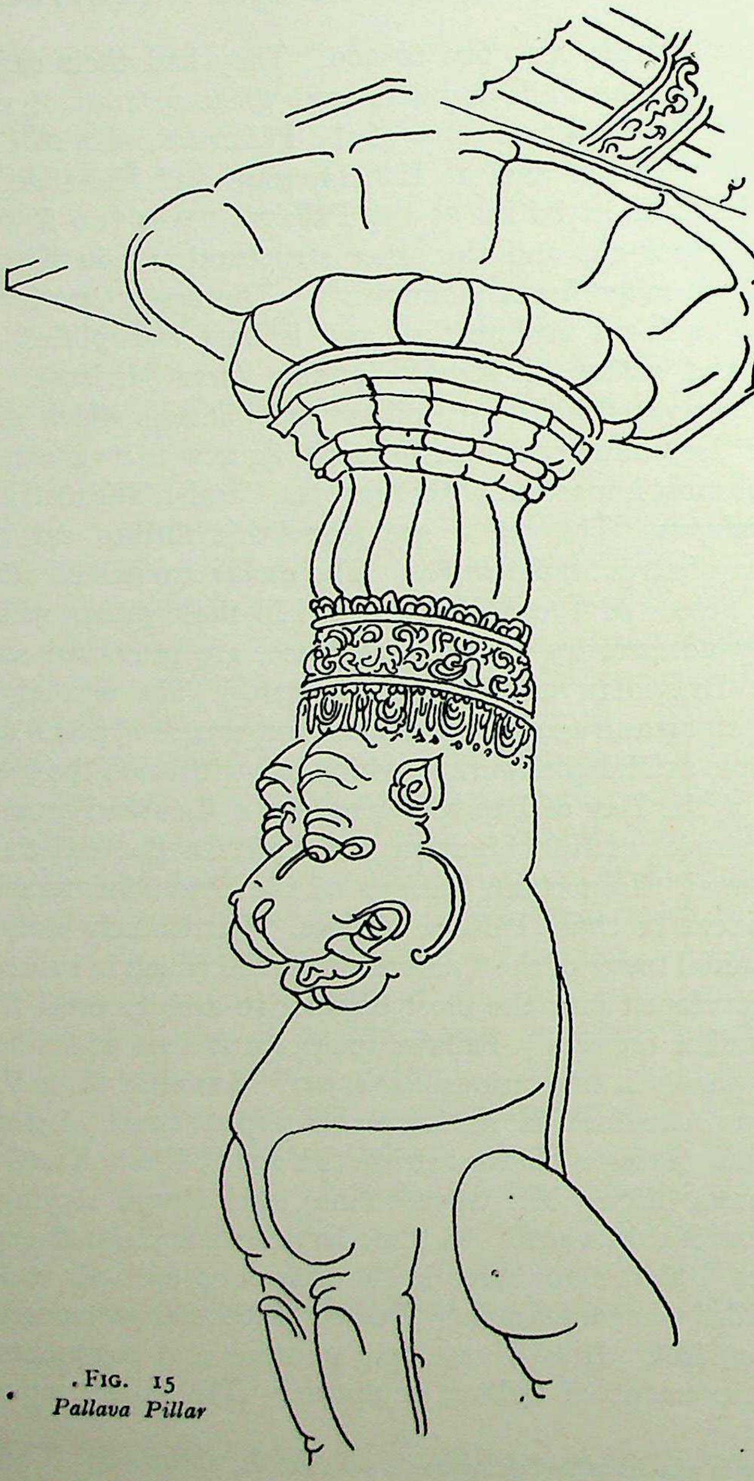
[26] This frieze is also identified as Arjuna's penance.



.FIG. 15
Pallava Pillar

State Museum,
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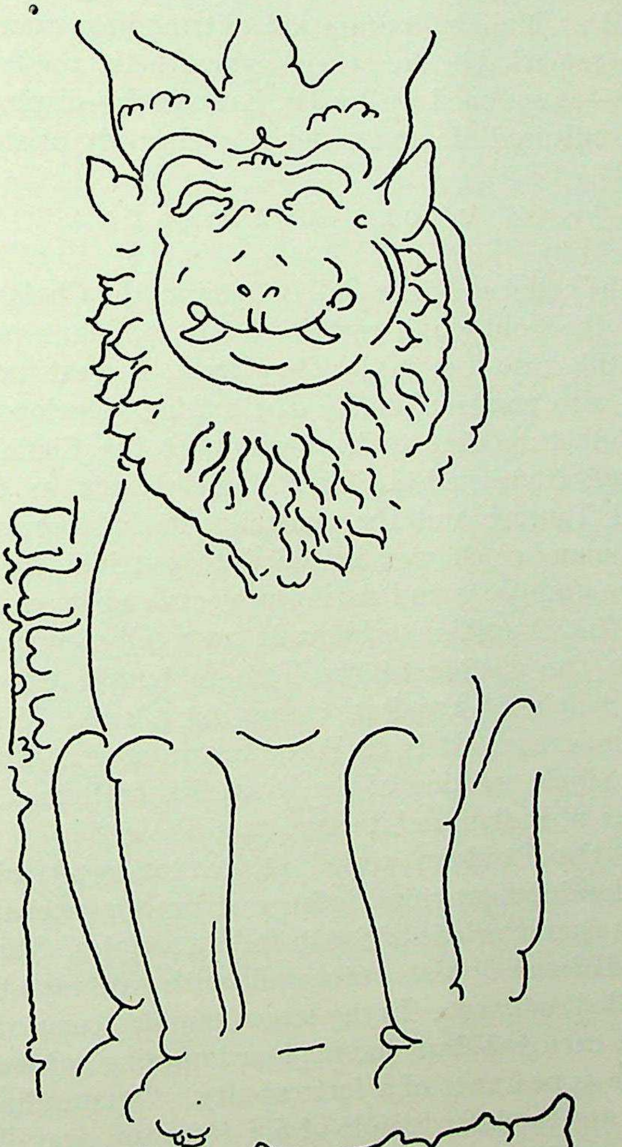

FIG. 16
Pallava Pillar

tation of animals such as the deer, the elephant, the monkey and the bull found at Mahabalipuram are outstanding examples of animal statuary remarkable for their sympathetic renderings. Pallava sculpture—as summed up by Dr. Kramrisch—displays "disciplined strength, cultured aloofness and is exclusively aristocratic."

CHOLA AND PĀNDYA

After the collapse of the Pallava power, the Cholas gained ascendancy in the South and remained the dominant power from the 10th to the 12th century. They were a great maritime power and were also great builders. The marked development in Dravidian architecture that took place under the Cholas can best be appreciated from such brilliant achievements as the great Siva temple of Tanjore and the Gangaikondacholapuram temple near Kumbakonam which was intended to outrival the Tanjore one. Both were ambitious and daring projects and magnificent achievements. The Dravidian *sikhara* is now fully evolved as may be seen from the *vimāna* of the Tanjore temple which rises to an imposing height of 190 feet, conveying a sense of solid strength, balance and grace. It is, as Percy Brown asserts, "unquestionably the finest single creation of the Dravidian craftsmen," and also "a touchstone of Indian architecture as a whole."

During the Pāndyan period (A.D. 1100-1350) which followed, another development came into great prominence and became an important characteristic of South Indian temples. This was the erection of *prākārams* or high outer walls with gateways topped by high pylons called *gopurams*. In the larger temples concentric walls were built, with each *prākāram* having four imposing *gopurams*, the whole having the appearance of a fortress-city. Outstanding examples of this class are the later temple of Sri Rangam, near Tiruchirappalli, which reached its present state between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, and the temples of Madurai and Chidambaram.

VIJAYANAGAR PERIOD (1350—1565) AND AFTER

Out of the historic necessity of stemming the rising tide of Muslim

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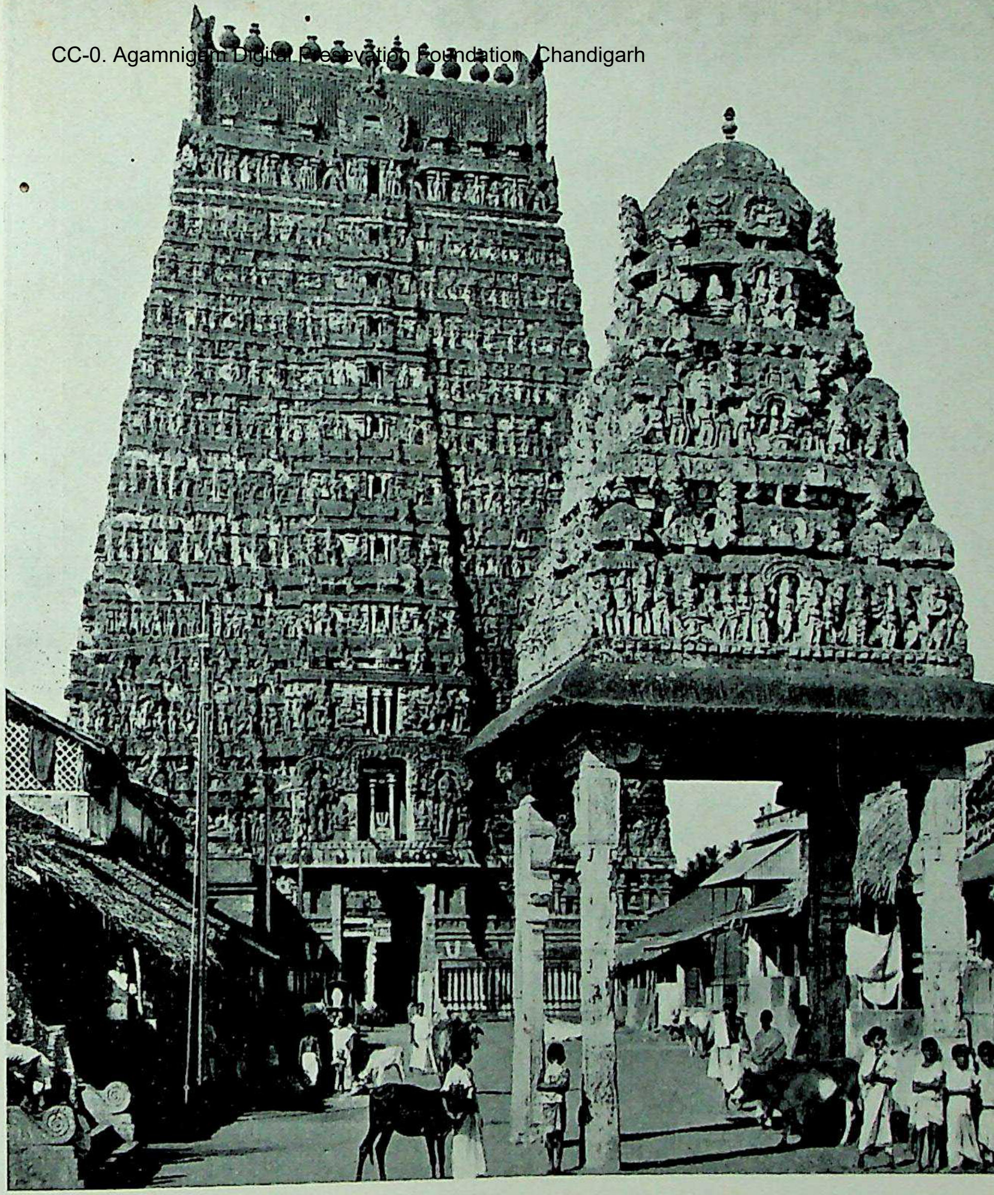
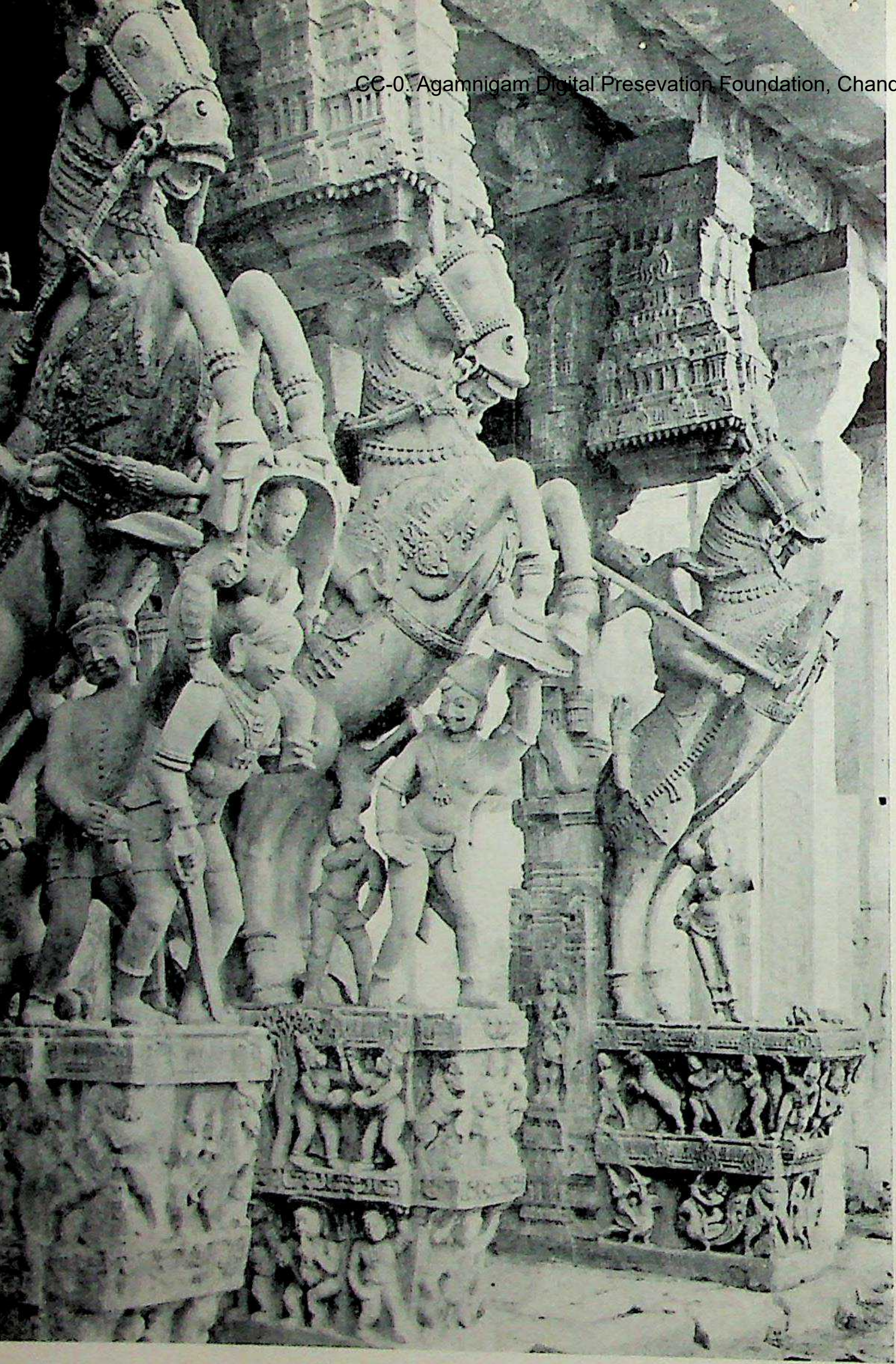
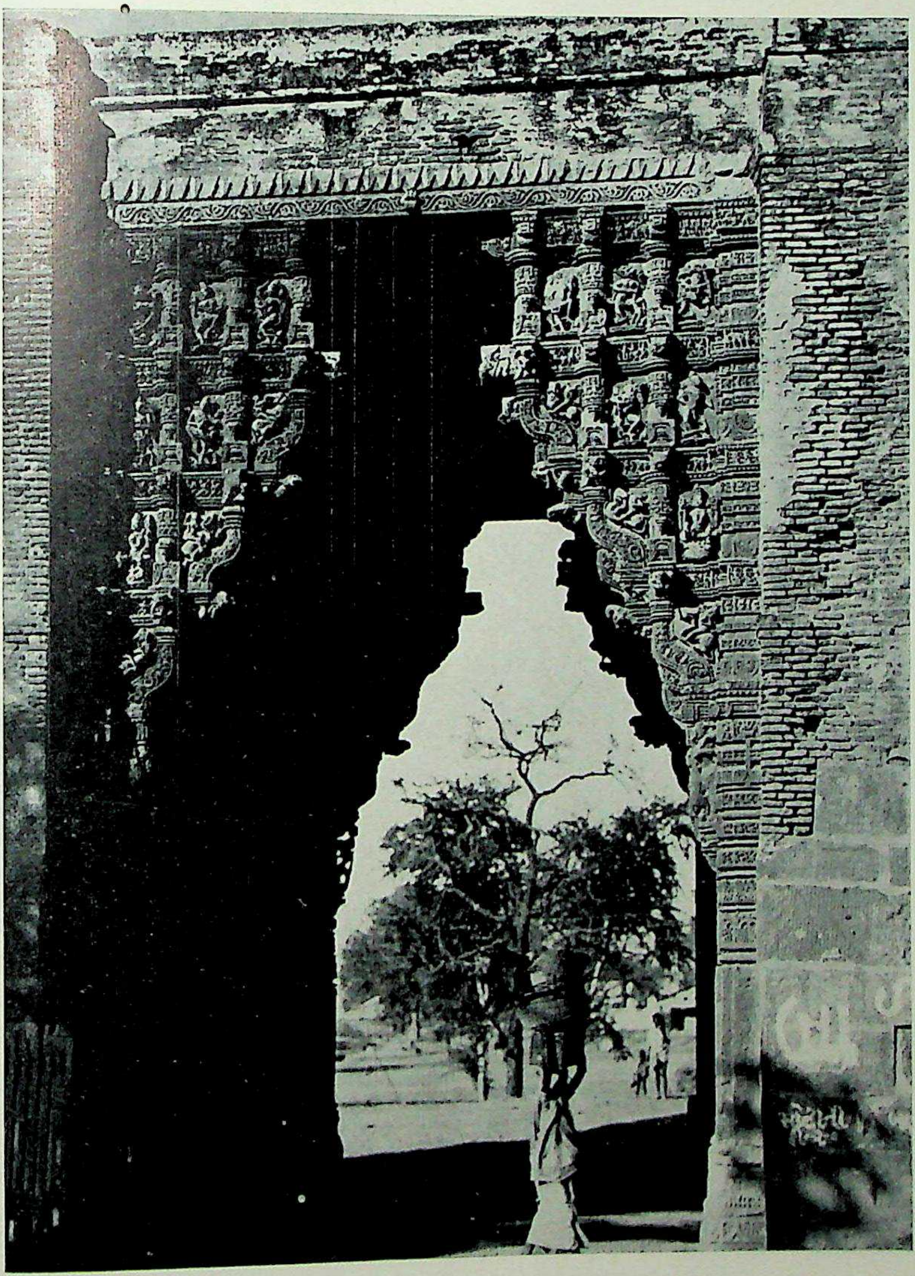


LIII. Sarangapani Temple, Kumbakonam, 16th Century A.D.



LIV. Mandapa of Sri Rangam Temple, 17th Century A.D.



LV. City Gateway, Dabhoi, 12th Century A.D.

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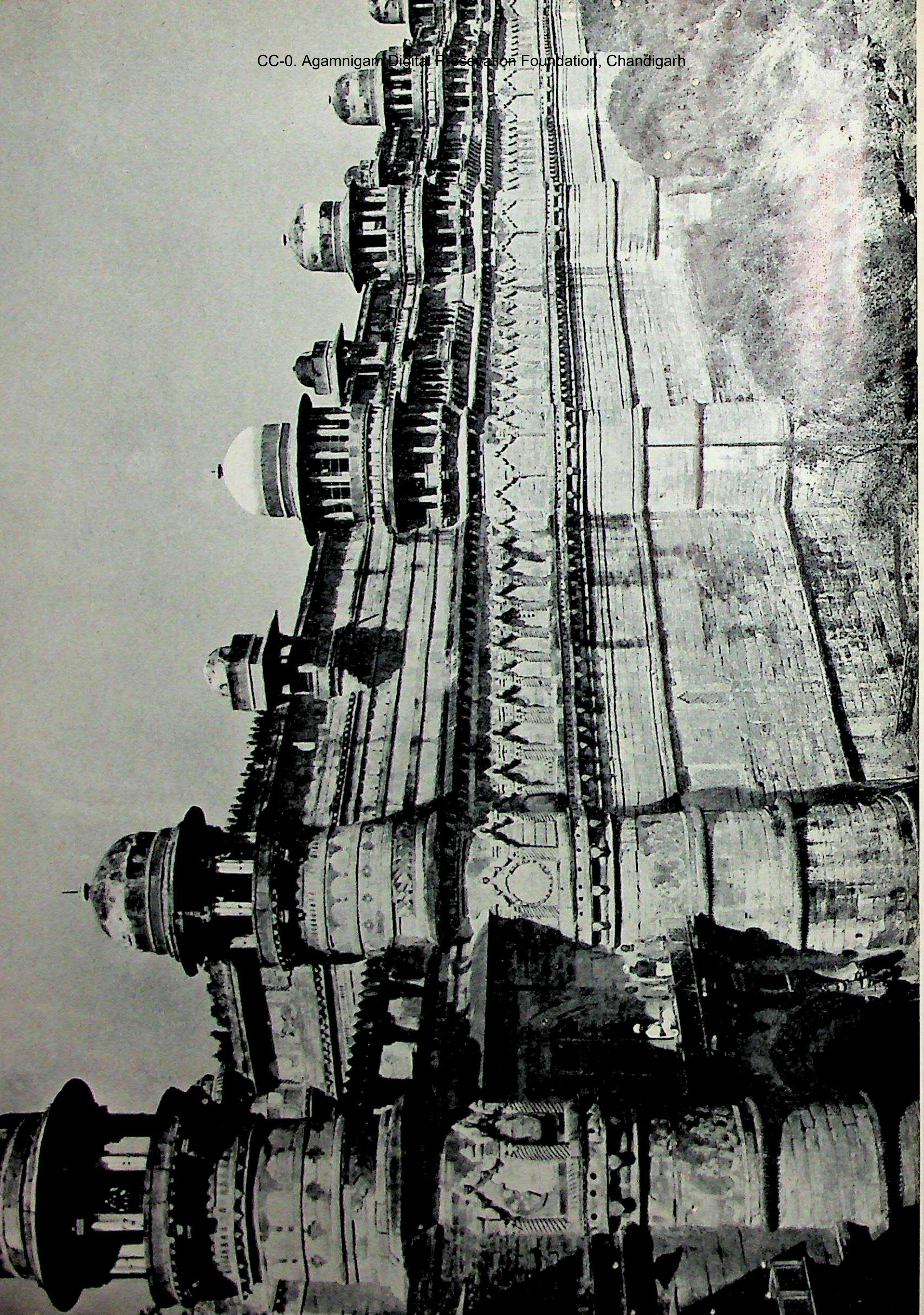
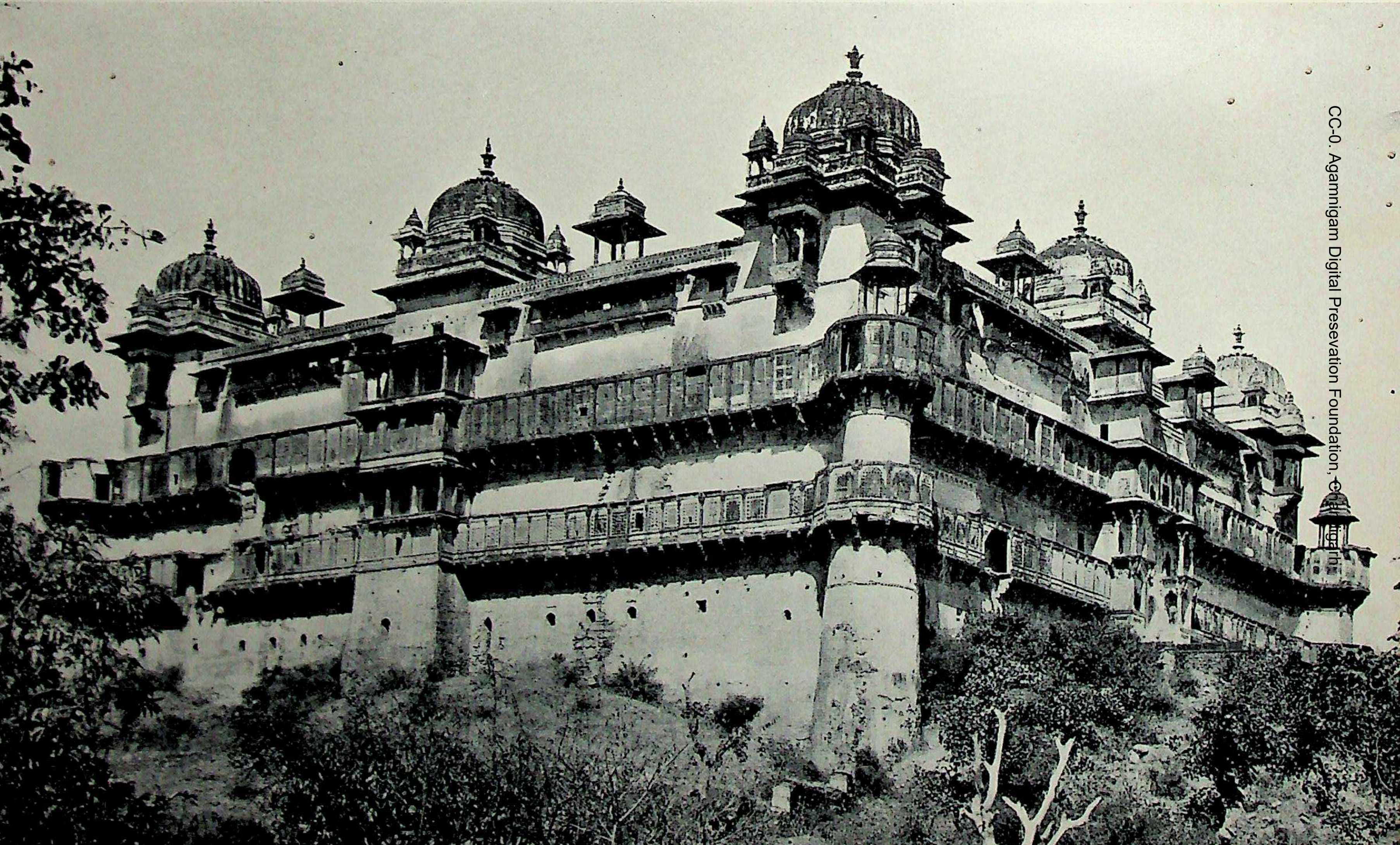
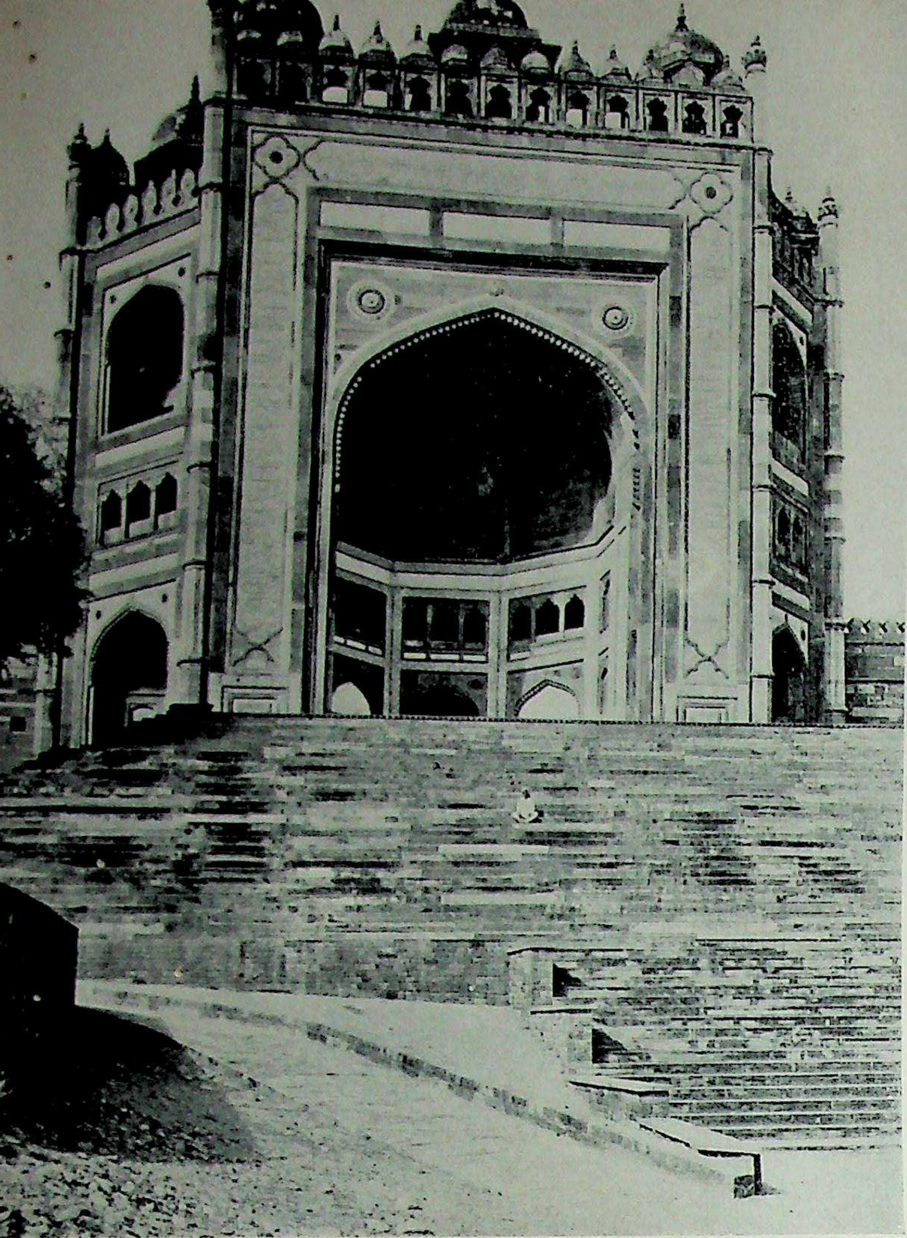


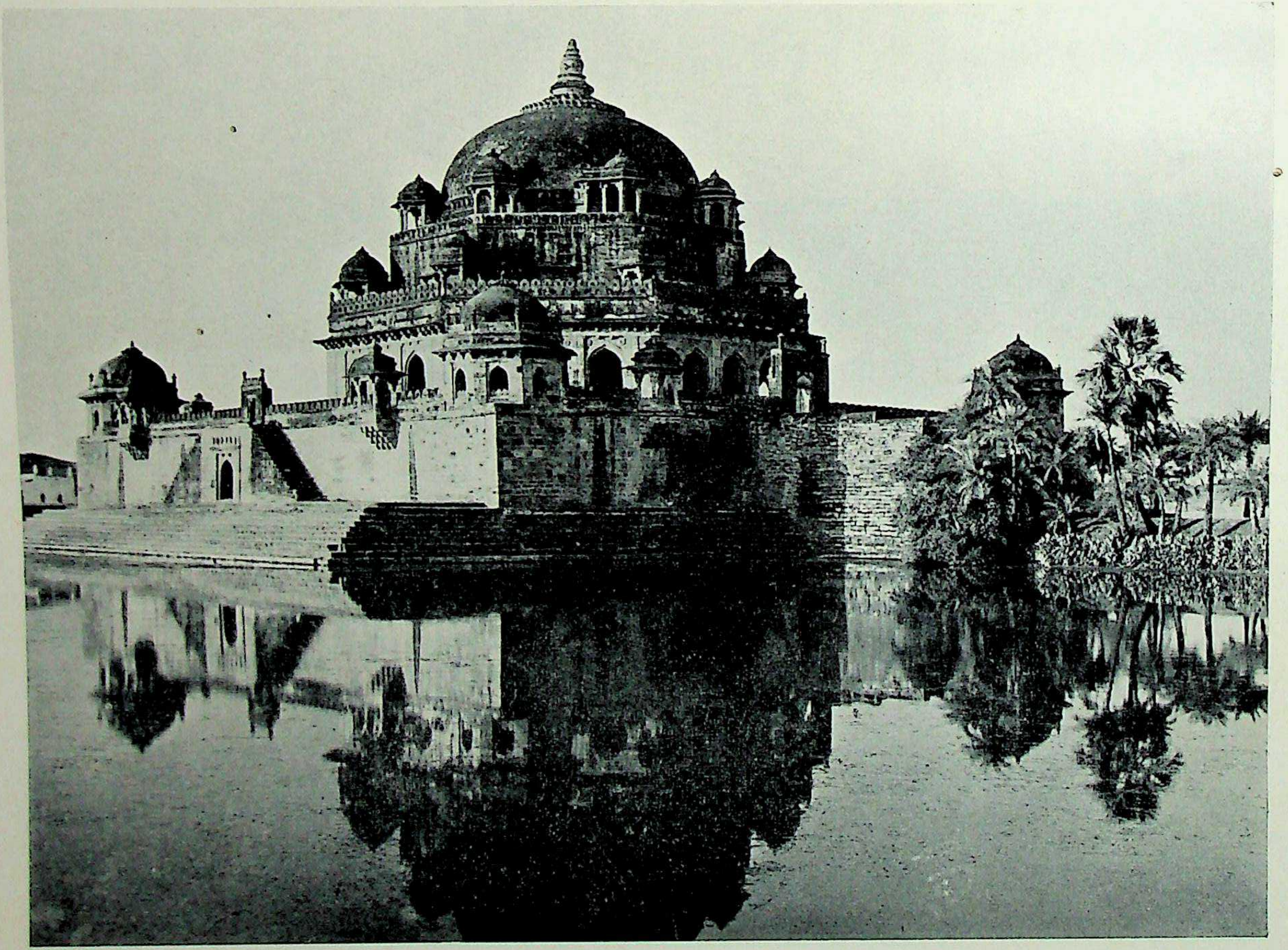
LVI. Man Mandir, Gwalior, 15th Century A.D.

LVII. Bir Singh Deo's palace, Datia, 17th Century A.D.

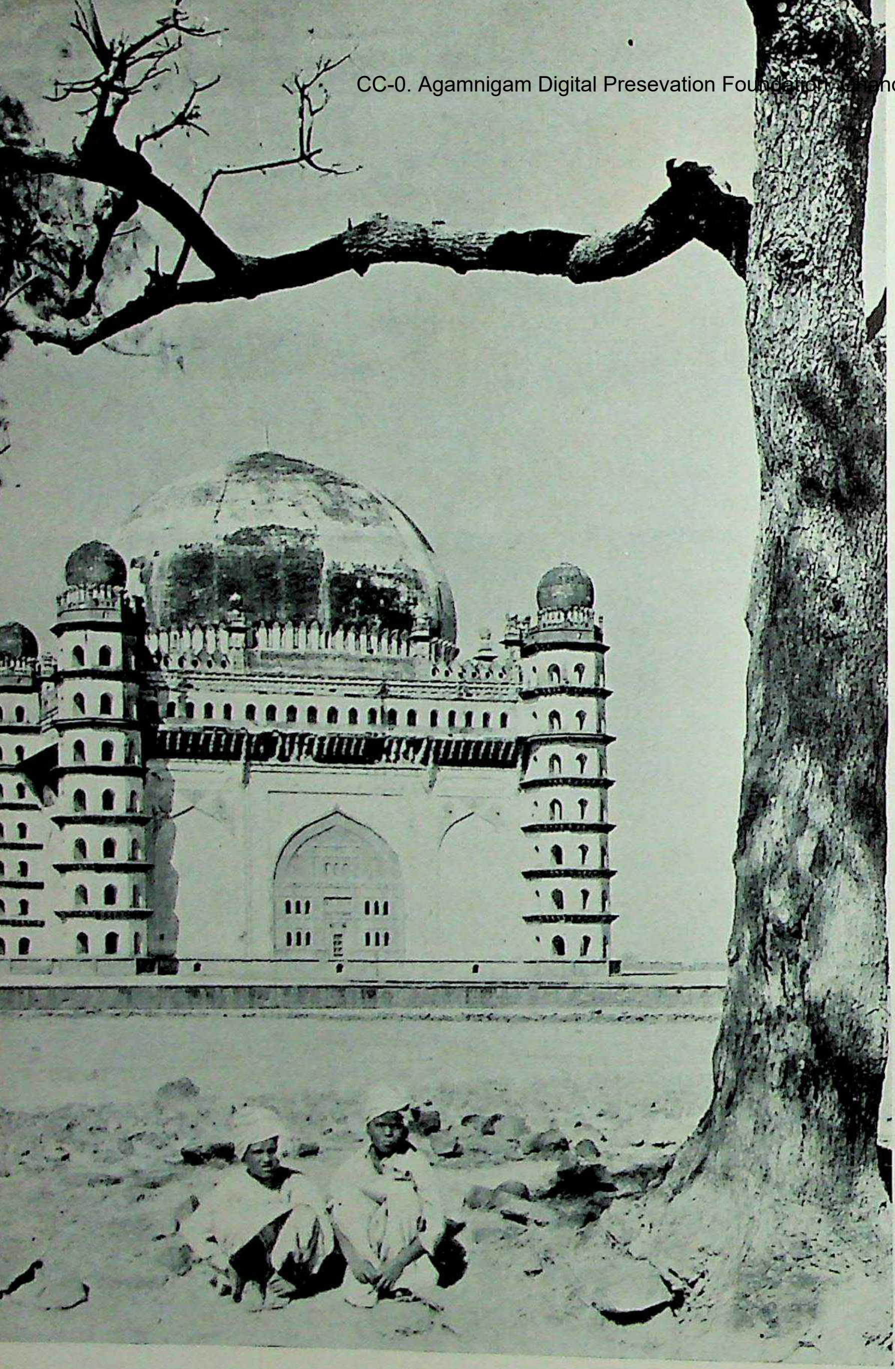




LVIII. Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri,
16th Century A.D.



LIX. Sher Shah's Tomb, Sasaram, 16th Century A.D.



LX. Gol Gumbaz, Bijapur, 17th Century A.D.

invasions of South India, the Hindus consolidated their power and the great and opulent empire of Vijayanagar rose and spread its supremacy all over the south. This empire lasted for nearly two centuries, from the latter half of the fourteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century, during which time its capital, Vijayanagar, was one of the foremost cities and its wealth and splendour became legendary. A new spirit was abroad ; there was a sense of renewed vigour and of opulence, qualities that found full expression in the architectural and sculptural activities that followed. Many beautiful shrines embellished with sculpture and ornate pillars were built, notable amongst which are the Vellore and Tadpatri temples, the Varadarajaswami temple of Kānchīpuram and the Horse Court of the Sri Rangam temple (Pl. LIV). But the most important monuments of this period are found in the city of Vijayanagar itself which is now deserted and very much in ruins. The Vitthala and Hazara Rama temples are the most notable ones. A prominent feature of the architecture of the temples of this period is the richly carved pillars and piers and—as Percy Brown observed—they were sculptured into the most complicated compositions, strange and manifold, so that each became a figurative drama in stone. The shaft of the pillars is formed of elaborately sculptured figures, often of heroic proportions.

Dravidian temple architecture had by this time fully developed. The great temples of Madurai, Rameswaram and Suchindram, all of the seventeenth century, and the Subramania temple of Tanjore, assigned to the eighteenth century—all typify the concluding phase of this style. This style of temple architecture is still alive in South India and is practised with accomplishment and skill whenever the right kind of patronage is assured.

The notable features of the South Indian temple are the *vimāna* and the *gopuram* (Pl. LIII). Many-pillared halls called *mandapas* and subsidiary shrines are other prominent features. Sculptural embellishment is both profuse and skilled. The expansion of mediaeval temples goes hand in hand with the spirit of the age reflected in the elaboration of ceremonies and rituals and the vast expansion of the pantheon.

The great traditions of South Indian sculpture which found impressive utterance in the Andhra and Pallava art reached a new creative phase in the mediaeval period under review. Fully integrated with architecture, it expressed in no uncertain terms the spirit of the times. Generally speaking, South Indian sculpture of this period is distinguished by tough vitality and plastic sensibility, despite phases of over-ornateness and even some rigidity in cult images (Pls. XXXIX & XL & Fig. 14). Stone sculpture is abundant and the impression of exuberance abides. Under the Cholas the creation of metal images received encouragement and the highest qualities of South Indian sculpture found adequate expression in metal images. Casting of images in bronze by the lost-wax process was increasingly practised from the late Pallava period, attaining a high degree of skill and accomplishment during the Chola period and continuing till the eighteenth century. Amongst the notable works in this medium are the Natarāja and other images of Siva (Pls. XXXVII & XXXVIII), figures of Kodanda Rama, of Pārvati or Gowri, the dancing Krishna and Ganesa and the portrait series of the mystics and saints of South India like Appar Swami, Manikka Vachagar, Tirujnāna Sambhanda Swami and Sundara Murti. The piety of these saints and the fervour of their mystic devotion to their chosen deity and the rapture of bliss they experienced are eloquently expressed in these wonderful bronzes. Here, transcendental experience is translated in terms of plastic idiom which undoubtedly is an amazing artistic achievement (Pls. XXXV & XXXVI).

EASTERN INDIA

The Northern or *Nāgara* style of architecture is found all over India except in the South. This has several phases of development. The earliest one was evolved in Eastern India, in Orissa between A.D. 750 and 1250. The thirty temples of the Bhuvanesvar group are the best examples of this school. Its distinguishing feature is the immense curvilinear spire which is crowned by a cushion-like finial. The most important temples of this group and those in which the style reached its maturity are the Lingaraja and the Sun temple of Konarak. The Lingaraja (A.D. 1000) stands in a large enclosure 520 feet by 465 feet. Several subsidiary shrines are grouped around the central one, an arrangement that is noticeable in the later Jain temples of Girnar and Satrunjaya as well as in Borobudur in Java. The spire of the Lingaraja rises to an imposing height of 125 feet and is impressive in the sense of serene majesty it conveys (Pl. XLI). The Konarak temple (13th century) is dedicated to the Sun-God and so, logically enough, it is designed as a chariot with twelve giant wheels and drawn by seven steeds which are richly caparisoned and marvellously sculptured. The design is unique. The plain treatment of the interior is in sharp contrast to the richly sculptured exterior which has a profusion of figures (Pls. XLVII & XLVIII) often dealing with erotic themes, sometimes with a frankness, a directness, that is breath-taking. This magnificent structure, of whose amazing beauty Abul Fazal, Akbar's official historian, has made special mention, now lies largely in ruins.

WESTERN INDIA

In Gujarat and Kathiawar in Western India, a large number of temples were built from the tenth to the fourteenth century. A great many of them were destroyed by the Muslim invaders. This prolific building activity was mainly due to the patronage of the Solanki rulers and the celebrated brothers Vastupala and Tejpala and also to the affluence that followed in the wake of the large-scale commercial activities for which this region is noted. The preference shown to the use of marble in place of stone is not a little due to the prosperous conditions that prevailed. The rich inheritance of skill of the Gujarati craftsmen found ample utterance in these noble fanes. The Sun temple at Modhera (11th century—Pl. XLIV) and the temple of Vimala Saha of Mount Abu (13th century) are the best amongst the remaining ones. In decorative wealth and delicacy of treatment the Jain temples of Mount Abu are unsurpassed (Pl. LI).[27] A decidedly florid note was evident in the later Jain temples of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Untold wealth was lavished on the construction of innumerable temples on hills which changed the entire landscape. These building activities continued for decades and large temple cities came into being as at Satrunjaya near Palitana (Pl. LII) and Girnar in Junagadh.

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[27] Of Mount Abu Cousens says, "The amount of beautiful ornamental detail spread over these temples in the minutely carved decoration of ceilings, pillars, doorways, panels and niches is simply marvellous; the crisp, thin translucent shell-like treatment of the marble surpasses anything seen elsewhere, and some of the designs are veritable dreams of beauty. The work is so delicate that ordinary chiselling would have been disastrous. It is said that much of it was produced by scraping the marble away, and that the masons were paid by the amount of marble dust so removed."

Rajputana is another region where beautiful temples were constructed during the three centuries from the eighth to the eleventh. Osia, near Jodhpur, contains a number of temples remarkable for the variety of their design, rich embellishment and elegance in execution. These belong both to the Jain and Hindu faiths. Rajputana also preserves the finest monuments of Hindu secular architecture which belong to the mediaeval period. Palaces or forts of a period older than these are scarcely to be met with in India. Of these, Man Mandir in Gwalior is the oldest (Pl. LVI). This extorted the admiration of even Babur who was a severe critic of things Indian. It was built by Man Singh (A.D. 1486-1516). Percy Brown observes that none of the buildings of the Mughals, richly decorated though some of them were, ever approached the romantic treatment or joyous colouring of this palace. It is one of the most remarkable monuments in India. Other important palaces are those at Orchha, Datia (Pl. LVII), Udaipur, Amber, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer and Bikaner which are influenced by the Mughal style.

CENTRAL INDIA (9th—13th CENTURY A.D.)

Under the Chandella rulers Central India witnessed considerable artistic activity. Of a group of nearly 85 temples erected only a few now survive. The most famous of these is the Kandāriya Mahādeva temple (Pl. XLII). In the Central Indian temples the *sikhara* achieves a much more refined and graceful effect than in others of the Northern style, which is mainly due to the grouping of miniature turrets.

Mediaeval temples are adorned with sculpture from the base to the top of the *sikhara*. In the various provinces of India mediaeval sculpture rose to great heights of achievement. Almost every region made its own distinctive contribution. The Eastern Indian school of sculpture that flourished in Bihar and Bengal under the patronage of the Pala and Sena rulers (A.D. 730—1197) is noted for its sensuous grace and dignity. In the Orissan temples was achieved the finest fusion of architecture and sculpture. Orissan sculpture is noted for its smoothness of modelling and exuberant grace (Pls. XLIII & XLVII). The Central Indian school was another prolific one with distinctive qualities (Pl. L). Several figures have markedly angular features and their sense of movement is impressive. Some of the female figures are presented in movements designed to present their all-sided charms.

INDO-ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

The advent of Muslims in India and the establishment of their rule necessitated the erection of Muslim religious buildings like mosques and tombs and secular ones like palaces and forts suited to their needs. This resulted in the introduction of certain new principles of construction like the use of arches and the bulbous dome and the employment of cementing material like mortar masonry. Like Mughal painting, Muslim architecture in India was the result of the interaction of Hindu and Islamic cultures and in the course of development it acquired certain distinctively Indian features revealing the ascendancy of the indigenous tradition and skill. By the twelfth century Muslim power had firmly established itself in Delhi and penetrated into almost every part of India.

Stylistically Muslim architecture in India falls into three broad schools. The earliest one is known as the pre-Mughal school of Delhi which lasted from A.D. 1200-1557. It came into being with the architectural activities of the rulers of the Slave Dynasty (1200-46) and flourished under their successors, the Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Saiyyads and Lodis. Qutb-ud-din, the founder of the Slave Dynasty razed Hindu temples and built mosques using the dismantled parts of the temples. Other Muslim rulers too followed this practice and very often the mosque was built on the temple plinth. The workmen who were called upon to build the mosques were the indigenous craftsmen well versed in temple-building. These were the factors that gave Muslim architecture in India its unmistakable Indian character. Amongst the monuments erected during the first phase, the most notable are the tombs of Iltutmish, Firauz Shah Tughlaq and Isa Khan, the Alai Durwaza, Moti Musjid, the Quila-i-Kuhna and the Kalan Musjid and the better known Qutb Minar.

With the consolidation of the Mughal power, Muslim architecture in India entered into a new era marked by brilliant achievements. The unlimited resources of the Mughal emperors and their pronounced aesthetic interests gave it direction and purposive force. Akbar's catholicity of outlook, tolerance and wide cultural interests laid the foundation of Mughal greatness and culture by encouraging a fusion of the Hindu and Islamic cultures. He created Mughal architecture. Fatehpur Sikri stands as a monument to his unique architectural achievements with its imposing Buland Darwaza (Pl. LVIII) and gems of craftsmanship like Jodh Bai's palace, the house of Birbal, the tomb of Salim Chisti and the Jami Musjid. Similarly the fort at Agra; but this subsequently underwent additions and alterations of a substantial nature during the reign of Shah Jehan. He pulled down several of the red sandstone structures and rebuilt them in marble. Another noteworthy monument is Humayun's tomb which was erected by his widow. It is an admirable synthesis of the Persian and Indian building traditions and later proved a model for the incomparable Taj Mahal at Agra. Most of the buildings erected by Akbar were in red sandstone and convey the impression of youthful, masculine vigour and reveal markedly Indian characteristics. Jehangir (A.D. 1605–27) succeeded Akbar but his interests were almost wholly pictorial. There was hardly any notable building activity during his reign except the tomb of Akbar at Sikhandara which is a magnificent structure set in a vast garden and is truly impressive. The interests of Shah Jehan (A.D. 1627–58) were mainly architectural and consequently Mughal architecture rose to supreme heights. Marble took the place of red sandstone and this was symptomatic of the opulence of the period. Sensuous, feminine grace is the keynote of the architecture of this period. Nothing was more calculated to express the brooding love of the monarch and his tenderness for his beloved Mumtaz than the delicate contours and voluptuous grace of marble embellished with the finest inlay in *pietra dura*. Others may have loved as deeply as Shah Jehan; others may have been great builders. But no one has succeeded in giving love so noble and so exquisite a habitation as Shah Jehan did in building the Taj at Agra. Other important monuments built by him are the Pearl Mosque, the Diwani Khas, the Diwani Ām and the Khas Mahal at Agra fort (LXI). Every one of these is a superb creation attesting to the skill and unsurpassed grandeur of Mughal architecture.

The post-Shah Jehan period was one of progressive disintegration of the empire and it witnessed the decadence of Mughal art. These were the direct result of the intolerant, fanatical and short-sighted policy of Aurangzeb (A.D. 1658–1707). The outstanding monuments of this period are the Badshahi Mosque at Lahore, now in Pakistan, and the Pearl Mosque at Delhi. The famous Sikh shrine, the Golden Temple at Amritsar, which is a very notable structure, was also built during this period.

With the expansion of Muslim power into the various parts of India, provincial schools of Islamic architecture arose, notably in Kashmir, the Punjab, Bengal, Gujarat and the Deccan. These schools were deeply influenced by local artists. Wherever the temple building tradition was strong, the provincial Muslim schools were able to create buildings of "remarkable beauty," as Percy Brown observes, "and displayed definitely original qualities. None of these actually reproduced the mode in Delhi; each was a spontaneous movement, arising out of the aspirations of those in power at the time to express their aesthetic ideals according to their own natural feelings." Outstanding examples of the provincial schools are the Adina Mosque (A.D. 1364) and the Tantipura Mosque (A.D. 1475) in Bengal, the Atala Musjid of Jaunpur (A.D. 1408), the Jami Musjid of Ahmadabad (A.D. 1423), the Jami and Nagina mosques of Champnir (A.D. 1485 and 1523 respectively), the Jami Musjid of Gulbarga (A.D. 1367), Ibrahim Rauza and Gol Gumbaz (Pl. LX) of Bijapur (A.D. 1659) and the Jami Musjid of Kashmir (A.D. 1400). The beautiful tomb of Sher Shah at Sasaram (A.D. 1540) (Pl. LIX) which stands in the midst of an artificial lake also deserves special mention.

Islamic architecture in India is distinguished by a chaste decorative sense and sober colour effects. The use of coloured ceramic tiles for roof and floor, mosaic inlay work with many-coloured stones, the total absence of human figure which is replaced by geometric or floral design in exquisite taste and the use of lattice windows are some of its notable features. As Jadunath Sarkar puts it, "refinement of taste or delicacy of touch is the supreme merit of Islamic decorative art as it was developed in India under the Great Mughals".[28]

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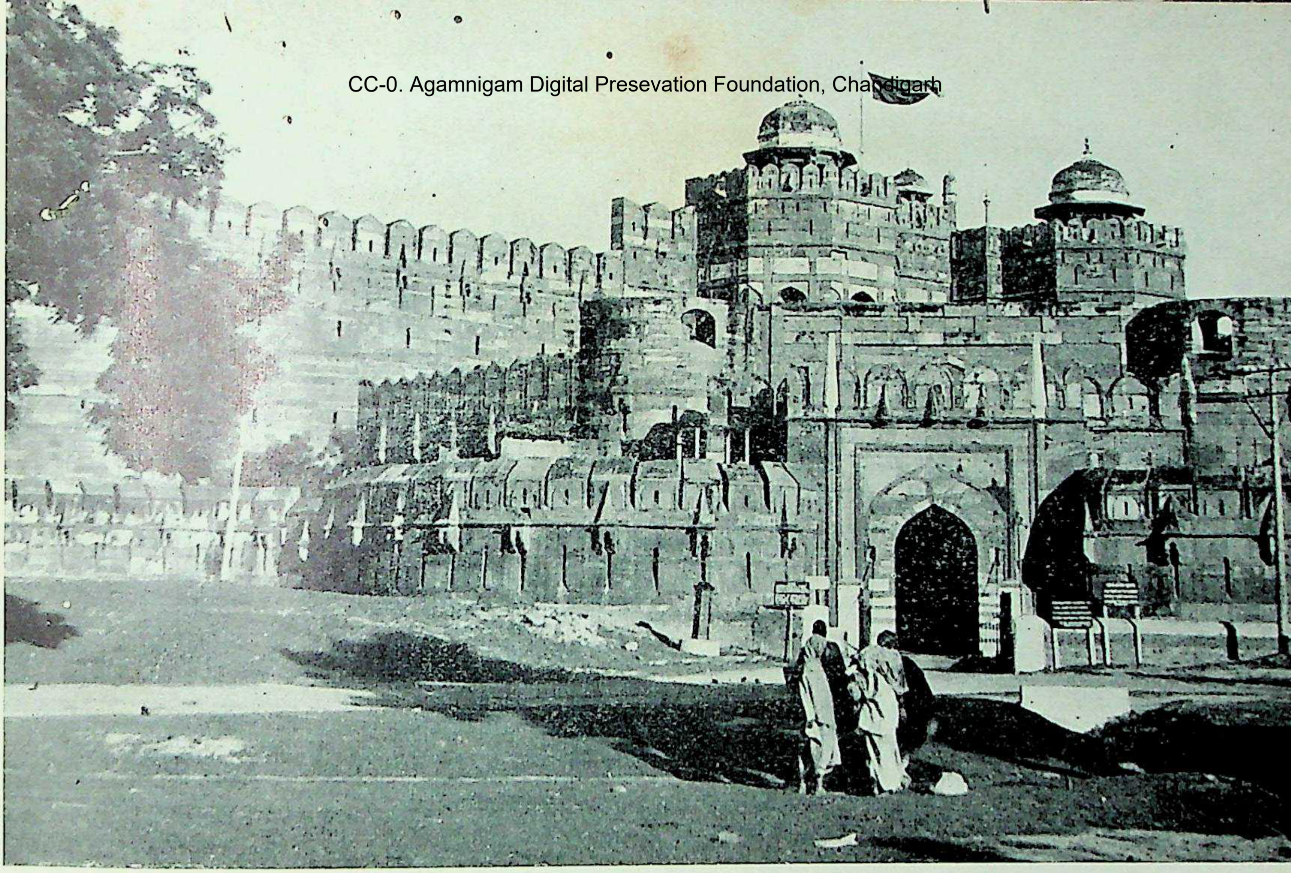
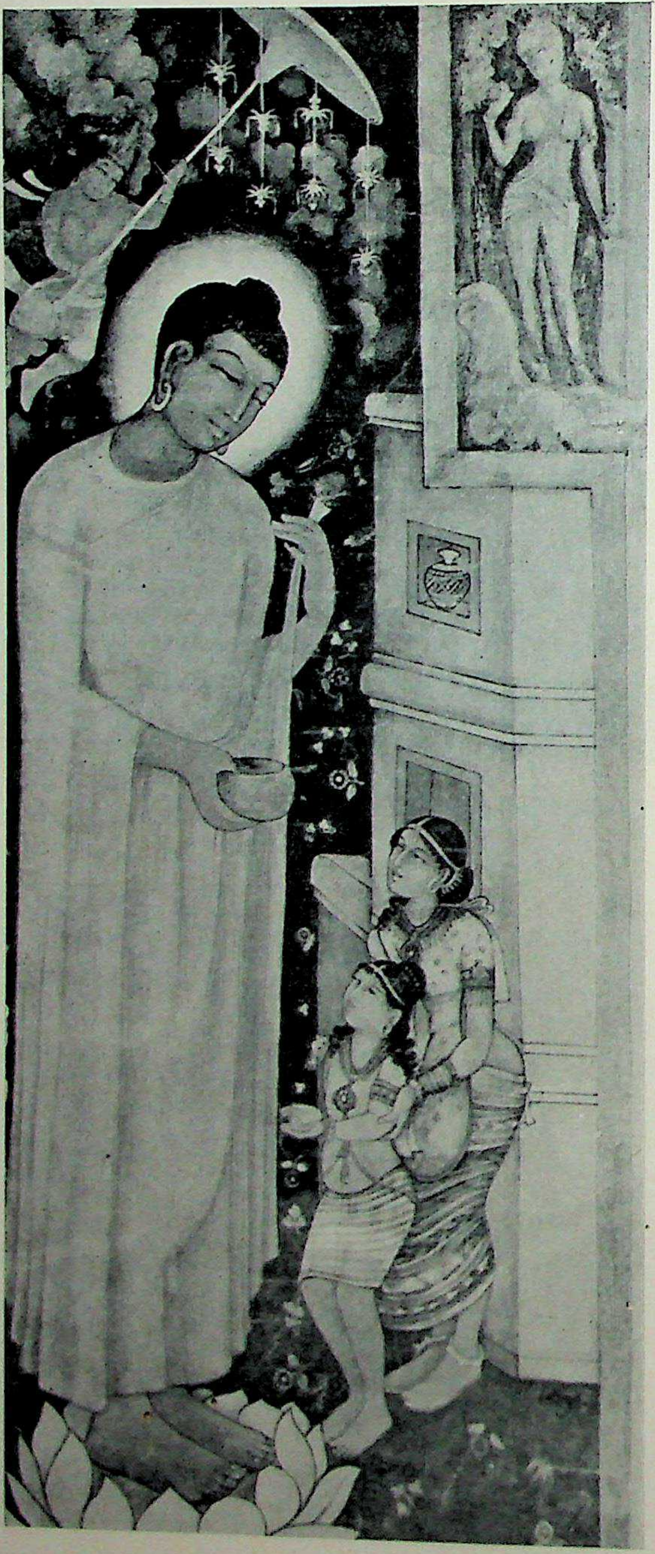
[28] *Glimpses in Mughal Architecture* quoted in *Marg*, June 1955, Vol. VIII, No. 3.



LXI. Red Fort, Agra, 16th Century A.D.



LXII. Mother and Child before the Buddha,
Ajanta, 6th Century A.D.

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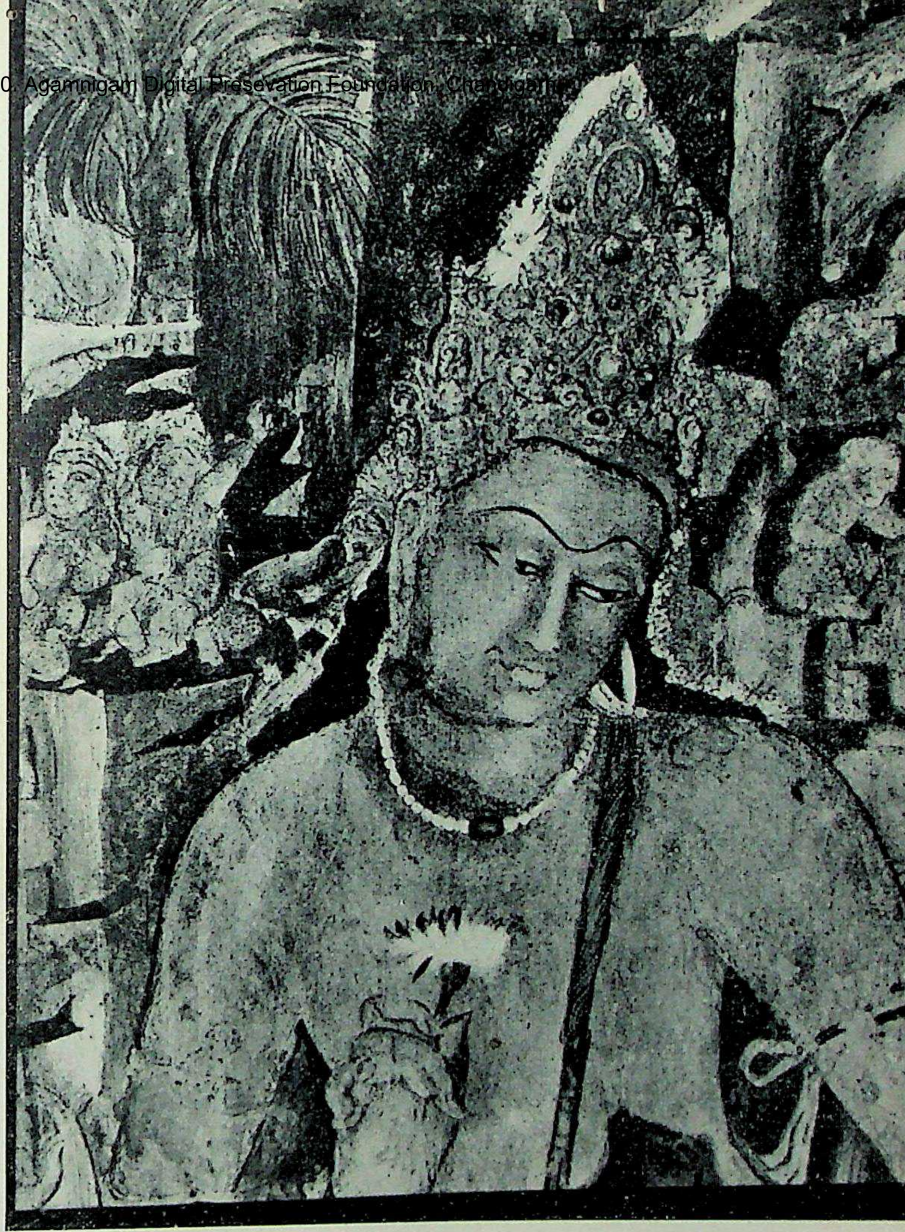
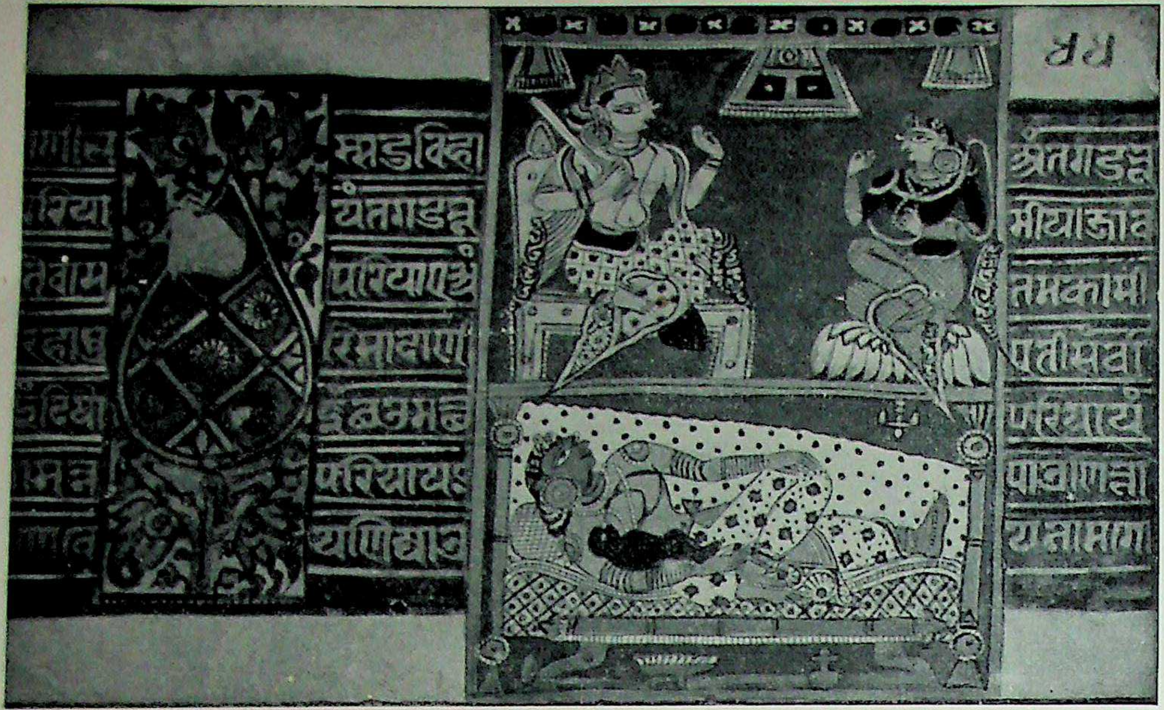
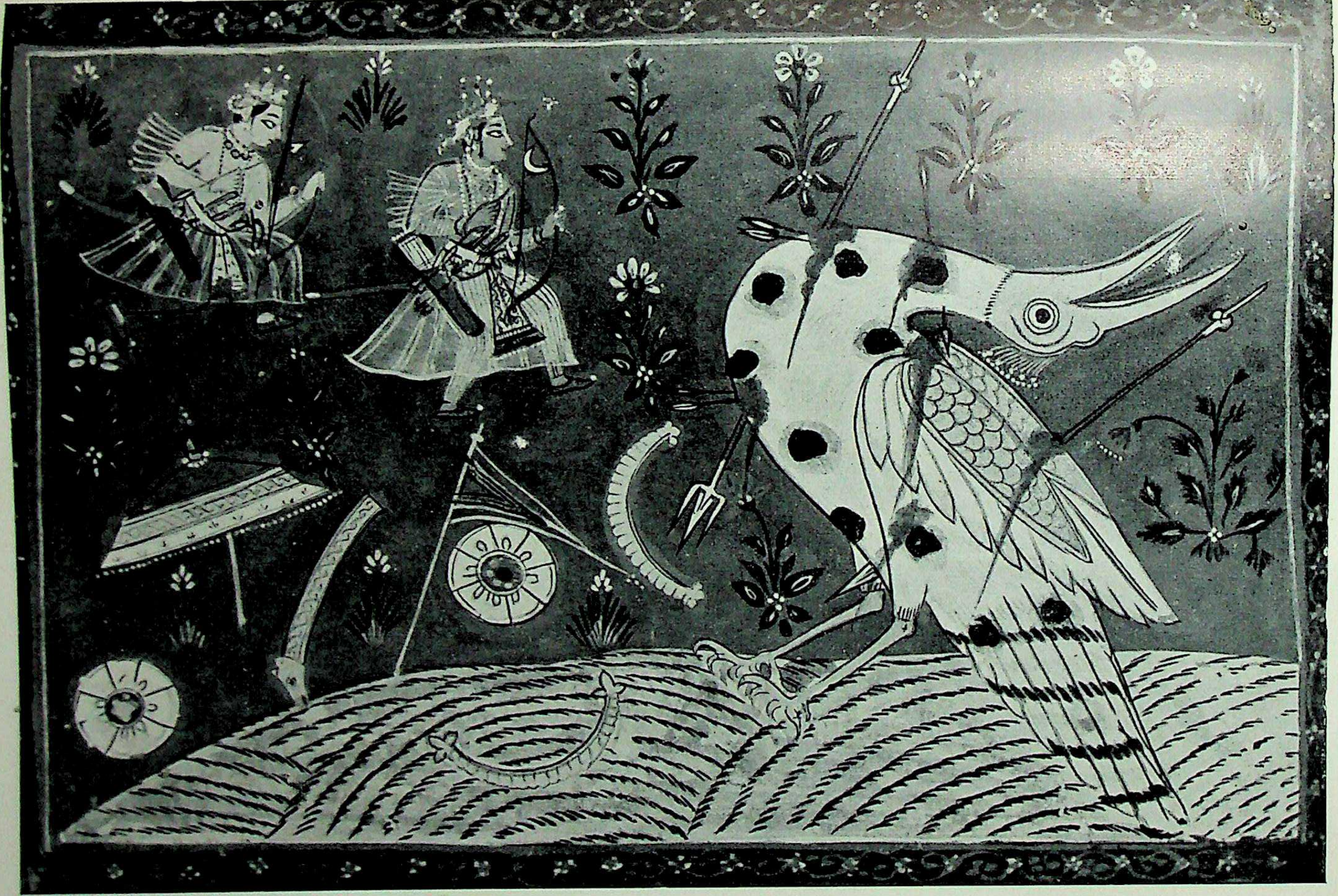


LXIII. Bodhisattva Padmapani, Ajanta,
Cave No. I, 6th Century A.D.



LXIV.
Illustrations from a Kalpasutra manuscript painted at Mandu in A.D. 1439 depicting the nativity of Aristanemi. In the upper panel is king Samudravijaya and queen Siva, the parents of Aristanemi, and in the lower panel the birth of Aristanemi is depicted

National Museum of India, New Delhi



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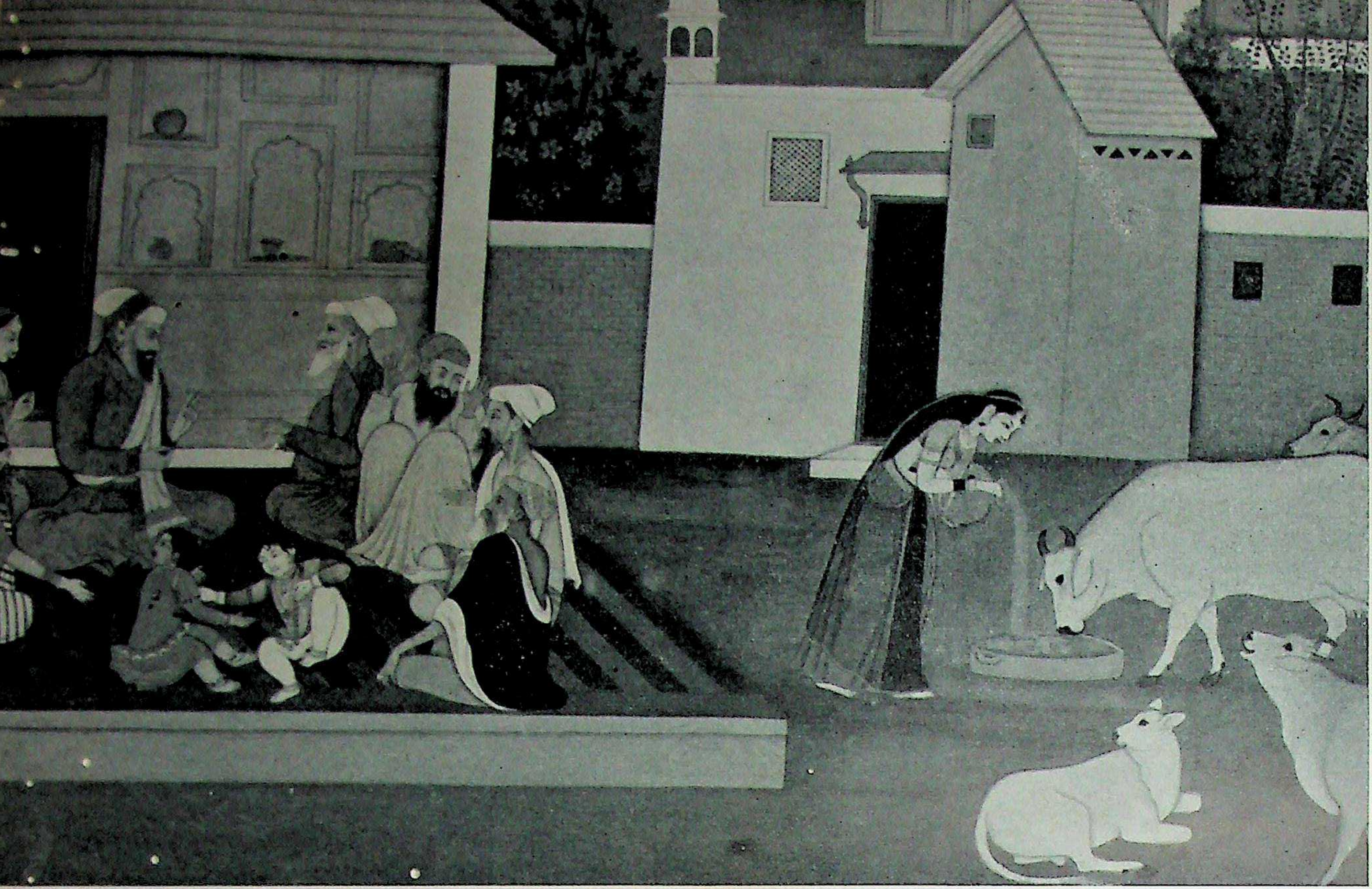
LXV. Dying Jatayu, a Rāmāyana scene, early Rajasthani, middle 17th Century A.D.



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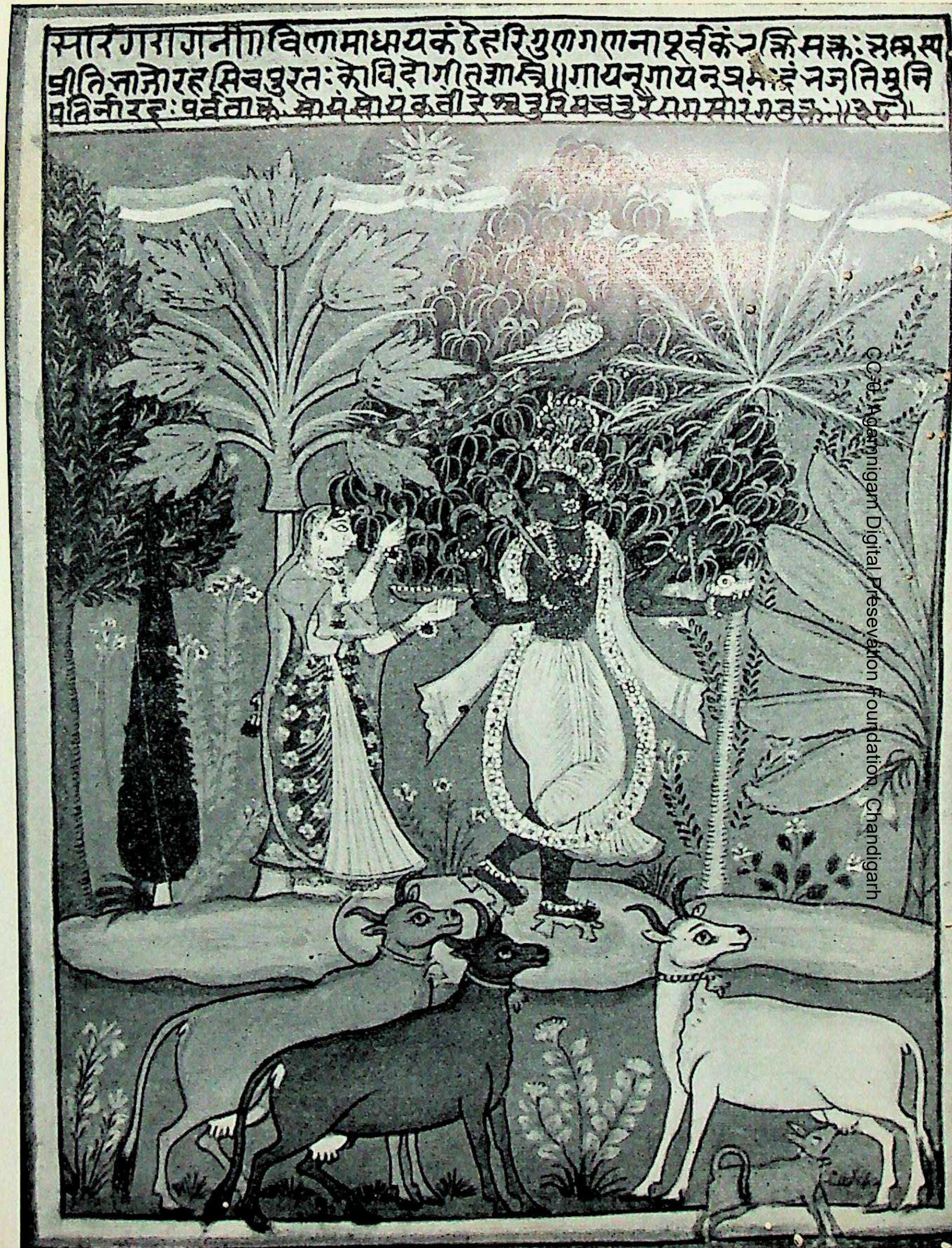
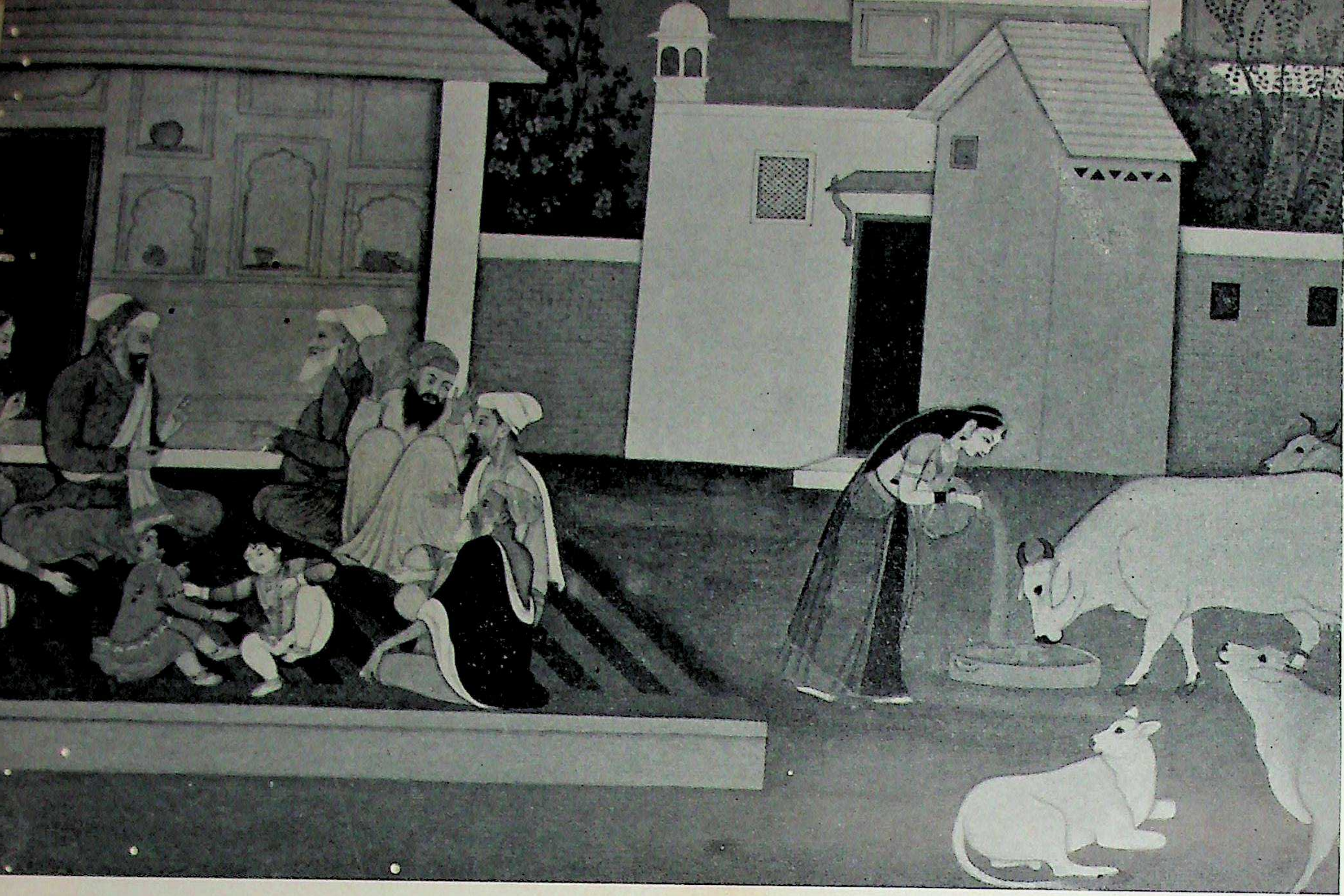
LXVI. Krishna at home, Kangra, late 18th Century A.D.



LXVII.
Sāranga Ragini, Rajasthani, middle 17th Century A.D.
National Museum of India, New Delhi



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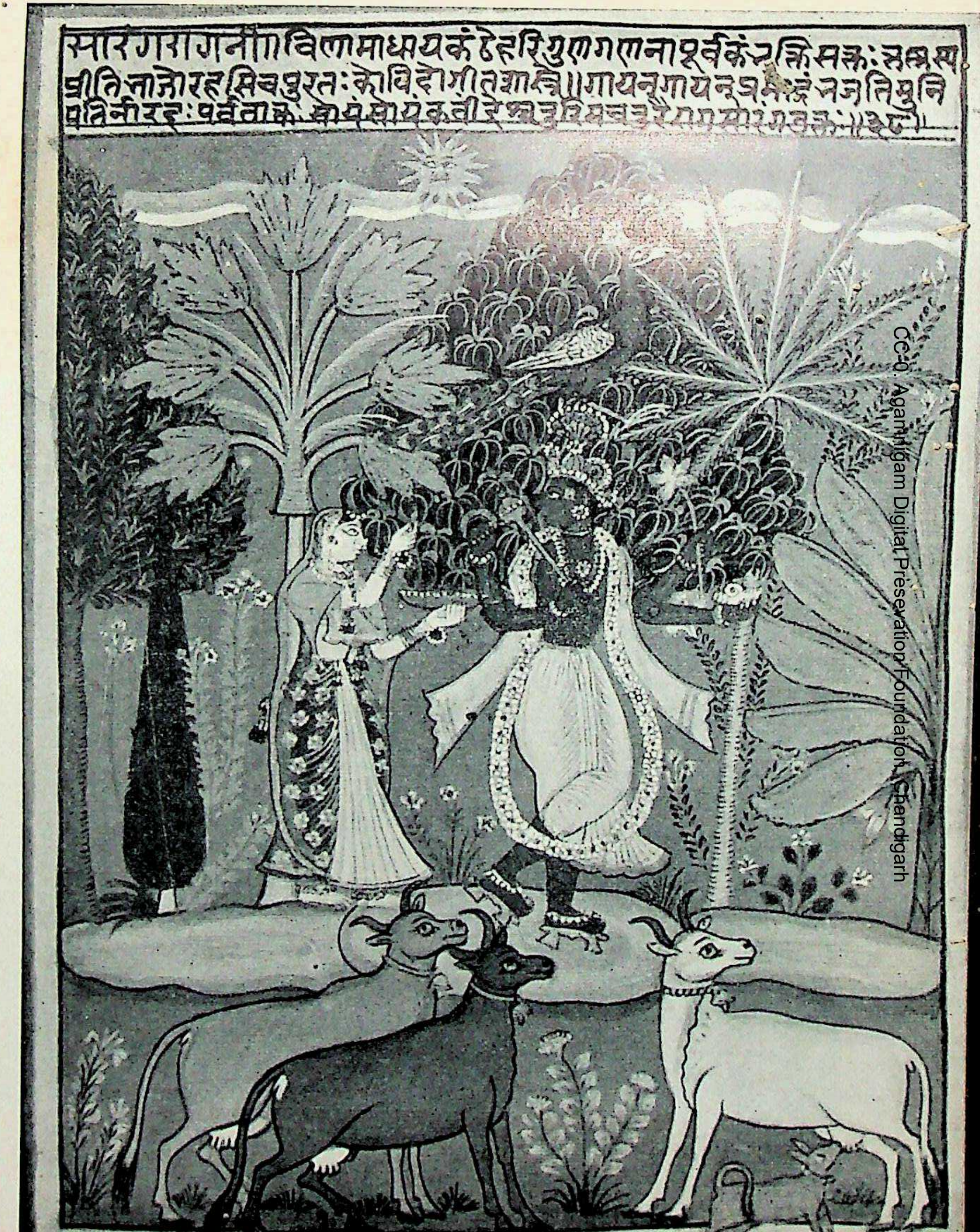
LXVI. Krishna at home, Kangra,
late 18th Century A.D.



LXVII.
Sāranga Ragini, Rajasthani,
middle 17th Century A.D.
National Museum of India, New Delhi

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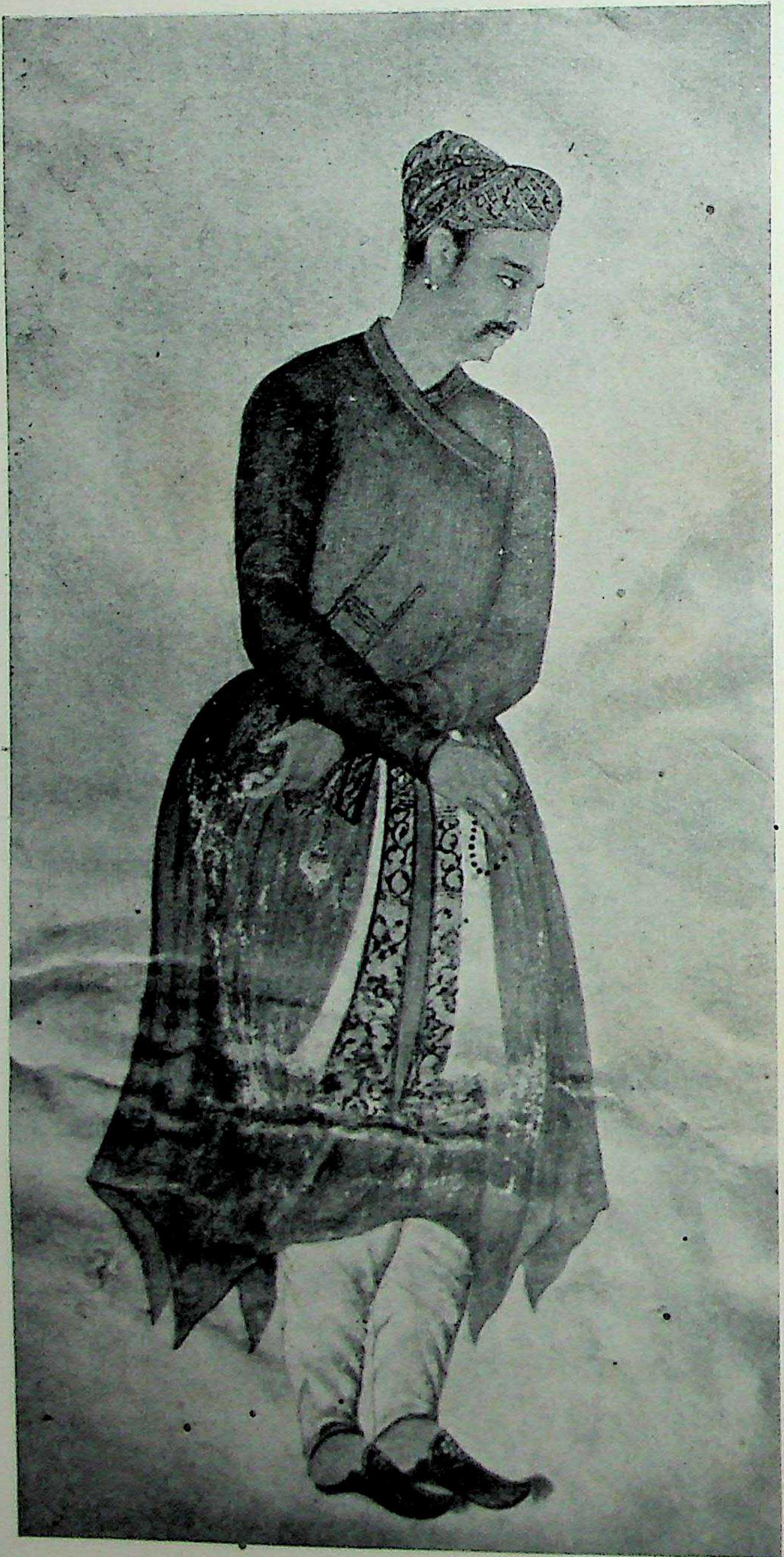

LXVIII. Portrait of Raja Birbal, Mughal, 17th Century A.D.

Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

5. A Bird's-eye View of Indian Painting

THE EARLIEST pictorial remains of India belong to the prehistoric period and are found in the ancient caves of Singhanpur and Mirzapur. They depict animals such as the elephant, the bison and the stag, and also human beings. The hunting scenes that occur amongst them are spirited, often displaying a feeling for the dramatic. These paintings bear a remarkable resemblance to the cave paintings found in Cogul in Spain which are attributed to the Aurignacian man.

Of the paintings of the historical period, the oldest so far known are the wall paintings of the Jogimara caves (Madhya Pradesh) which are ascribed to the first century B.C. They are in an advanced stage of deterioration. The art of painting was practised in ancient India ; that it was highly developed is evident from the innumerable references in Sanskrit literary works to painted halls, travelling exhibitions and to the execution of portraits. Authoritative texts on painting must have existed long before the opening centuries of the Christian era. In the *Kāmasūtra* of Vatsyayana, a work assigned to the third century A.D., the principal canons of this art, which had been clearly formulated after hundreds of years of practice, are dealt with. These canons are known as *sadanga* or the six limbs of painting.[29] These are (1) *Rupabheda* or the knowledge of appearances, (2) *Pramanam* or correct perception, measure and structure, (3) *Bhava* or action of feelings on forms, (4) *Lavanya-yojanam* or infusion of grace and artistic presentation, (5) *Sādrisyam* or similitude and (6) *Vārnikabhangi* or the artistic manner of using the brush and colours.

These principles are undoubtedly a measure of the great achievements of Indian pictorial art. An intimate knowledge of the art of dancing was considered essential for the painter. The remarkable rhythmic quality which characterises Indian painting throughout the ages, the poise, the grace of movement and the eloquent gestures of the figures, are undoubtedly the result of the painter's deep insight into the beauty of movement he learned from a study of dancing. The *Vishnudharmottaram*, a later work, refers to the classification of paintings as *Satya* (true), *Nāgara* (secular), *Vainika* (lyrical) and *Misra* (mixed) and also recognises what is appropriate to decorate palaces, temples and private houses.

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[29] Abanindra Nath Tagore, *Sadanga, The Six Limbs of Indian Painting.*

The most significant examples of the embodiment of the six limbs are found in the world-famous Ajanta wall paintings (Pls. LXII & LXIII). All the caves at Ajanta were originally embellished with paintings but owing to the ravages of time and neglect, most of them are defaced and what remains of importance is now seen in six of the caves only. Roughly, these cover a period of six hundred years from the first to the seventh century A.D. revealing how continuous was the practice of painting in these caves. Culturally and artistically this was a highly creative period. Buddhism had spread over a very large part of Asia. Indian culture was implanted in Nepal, Tibet, Central Asia, China, Japan, Cambodia, Siam, Burma, Bali, Java and Ceylon. The achievements of the Indian artists of this period have, generally speaking, remained unsurpassed. The Indian pictorial tradition which reached its great height of achievement in Ajanta and also at Bāgh (M. P.) spread later to Ceylon (Sigiriya), Khotan and Tunhuang in Central Asia, and to far-away Japan (Nara and Horuyuji). Sir John Marshall has aptly summarised the qualities of the Ajanta school of painting and its contribution to the art of Asia. "The school which these paintings represent was the source and fountainhead from which half the art of Asia drew its inspiration and no one can study their rhythmic composition, their instinctive beauty of line, the majestic grace of their figures and the boundless wealth of their decorative imagery without realising what a far-reaching influence they exerted on the art not of India alone and her colonies, but of every other country to which the religion of the Buddha penetrated. Nor are these paintings to be appraised only in relation to the art of Asia. They will bear comparison with the best that Europe could produce down to the time of Michael Angelo . . . ." Except for the depiction of certain historical scenes, the subjects of these wall paintings are taken from the *Jātaka* stories (birth stories of the Buddha). These stories gave illimitable opportunities to the artists to depict the world in all its varied phases. The Buddha, before he attained Buddhahood, had passed through many births during which he was once the noble stag Ruru, a self-sacrificing monkey king Mahakapi, and Shaddanta the magnanimous six-tusked white elephant. As prince Vessantara, Rama and Sibi he had lived in the world practising the highest virtues before he rose to the position of the supreme Buddha. The sense of unity with all forms of life which the *Jātaka* stories so well emphasise covers the world of the devas, of human beings, of animals and the vegetable kingdom. All life, they proclaim in no uncertain way, is one though its manifestations are manifold. They possess an intense human appeal, voicing the joy of life and the preciousness of happiness. Even the oldest paintings which are ascribed to the first century A.D. (Caves IX and X) disclose an art of some maturity, the "finished work of a school trained in high art". The scenes depicted are characterised by vitality and action. The figures are drawn with admirable skill and painted with a deep understanding of colour values. But essentially it is an art of line, as Percy Brown so well summarises its qualities, as all Indian and Eastern art is. The artists of Ajanta were so much the masters of line that to their subtle and sure touch the line yielded all pictorial secrets. Every degree of expression is rendered with the subtle handling of the line. "Not only do these frescoes represent his (artist's) visualization of the rounded object translated into line, but his actual treatment of this line is so subtle and experienced that by its varying quality and sympathetic utterance it embodies modelling values, relief, fore-shortening and all the essential elements of the art. It is doubtful whether any artist has equalled the Buddhist painter in his capacity for analysing the complexities of the human form and then rendering in his picture what is essential by means of a simple line." Rarely has the beauty of form been rendered with so much skill and understanding as at Ajanta.

So remarkable an achievement as at Ajanta, where, for nearly

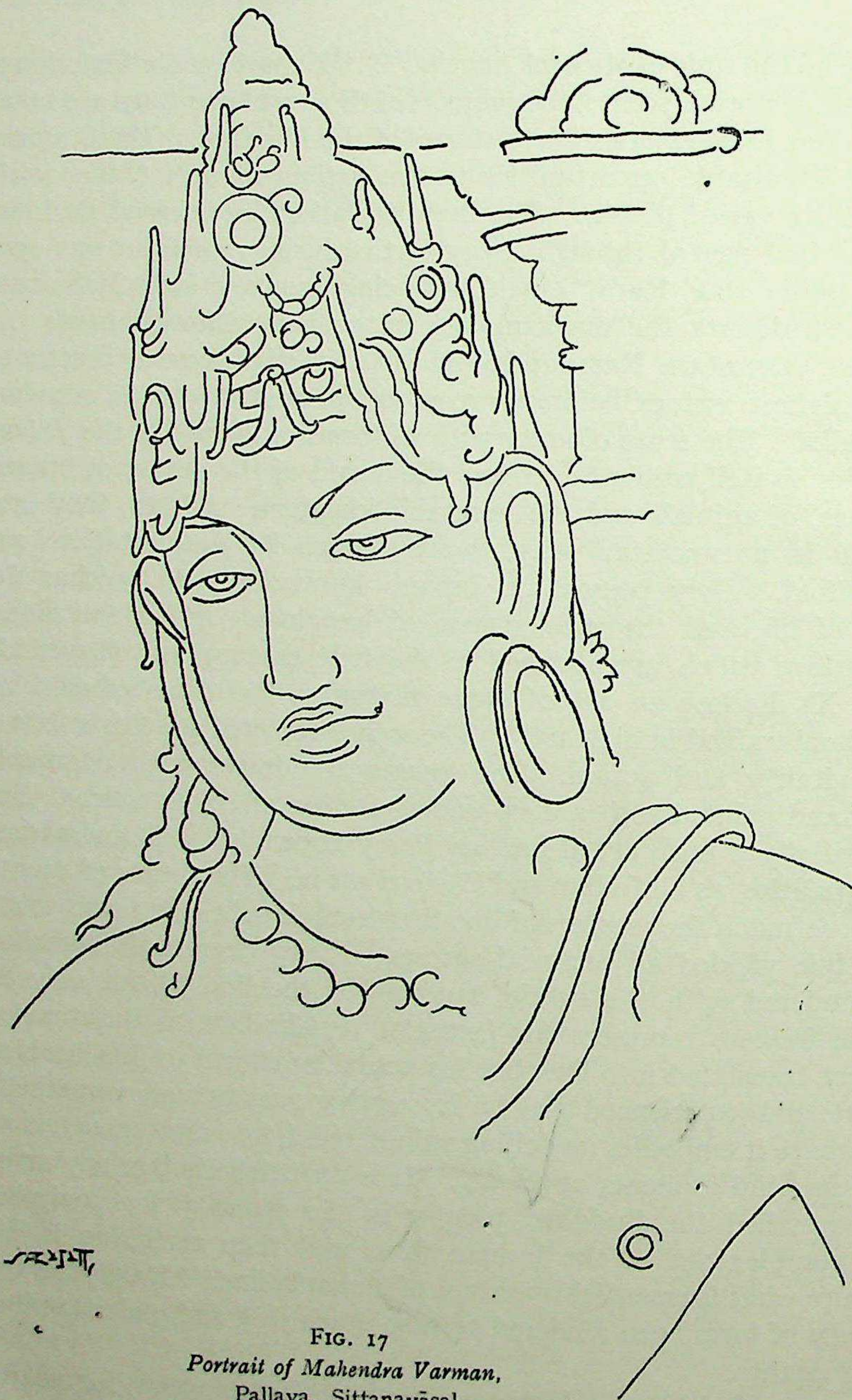


FIG. 17
Portrait of Mahendra Varman,
Pallava, Sittanavāsal

six hundred years, master artists worked hard and created one of the greatest picture galleries of all time, was not an isolated one. There were skilled paintings on the walls at other places too. Both Fa Hian and Hiuen Tsang, who travelled extensively in India, bear independent testimony to the existence of such paintings. Of these none are known except perhaps the famous Bāgh frescoes at Gwalior. The deadening touch of time and the destruction wrought by Muslim conquerors are responsible for their disappearance. From the eighth to the sixteenth century is a dark period in the pictorial history of India for the paucity of material available. Northern India was politically convulsed by periodic Muslim invasions and attempts at the consolidation of Muslim power and the disruption of Hindu power. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence to show that the art was practised at different centres. The illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts of Pala Bengal and of Nepal of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the Jain miniatures of Western India belonging to the twelfth and fifteenth centuries are perhaps all that are known as belonging to this period.

In the South the tradition of wall-painting continued during the mediaeval period, a few examples of which exist at Badami (6th century A.D.) and at Sittanavāsal (7th century A.D.) and at Ellora and Kānchīpuram (8th century A.D.) and later at Tanjore (Fig. 14, 17 & 18). In the far south in Malabar wall-paintings were executed in the Padmanabhapuram palace and in the palace at Cochin (17th and 18th centuries respectively). The Malabar school of painting as seen at Padmanabhapuram, Cochin and other places like the Ettumanur temple is a distinct one with several zonal peculiarities.

The introduction of paper into India early in the fifteenth century gave impetus to book illustrations. So, when painting once more comes into its own in the Jain (Western India school), Mughal and Rajput schools, it is mostly in a reduced or miniature form. The Western India school is popularly known as the Jain school because of the preponderance of the illustrated manuscripts belonging to the Jain sect. It is one of the great schools of Indian painting and attests to the vitality of the pictorial tradition of India and its diversified and rich manifestation. How different is the world presented by these "enchanted miniatures" from that of Ajanta!

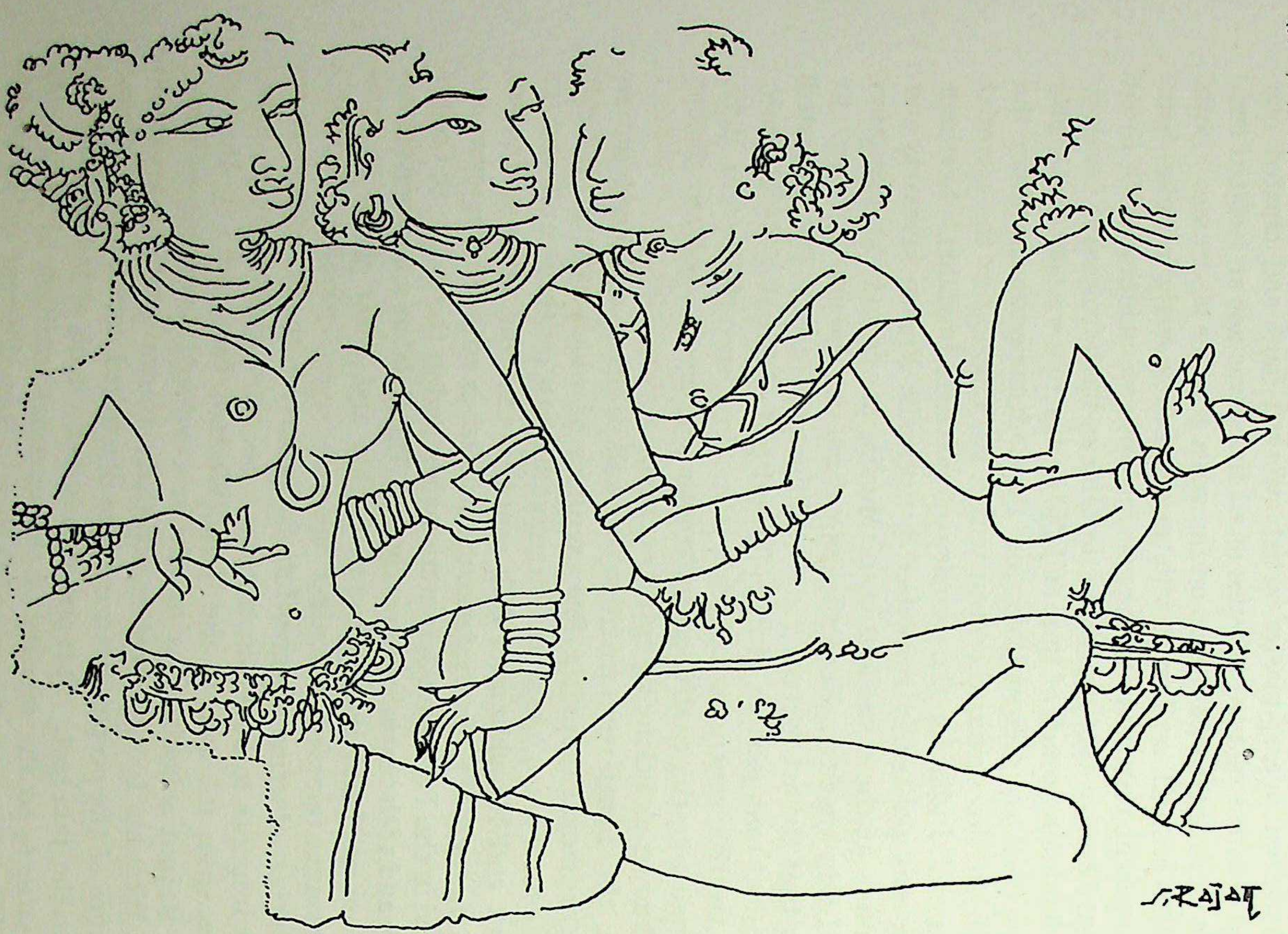


FIG. 18
Royal ladies, Chola painting, Brihadisvara Temple, Tanjore

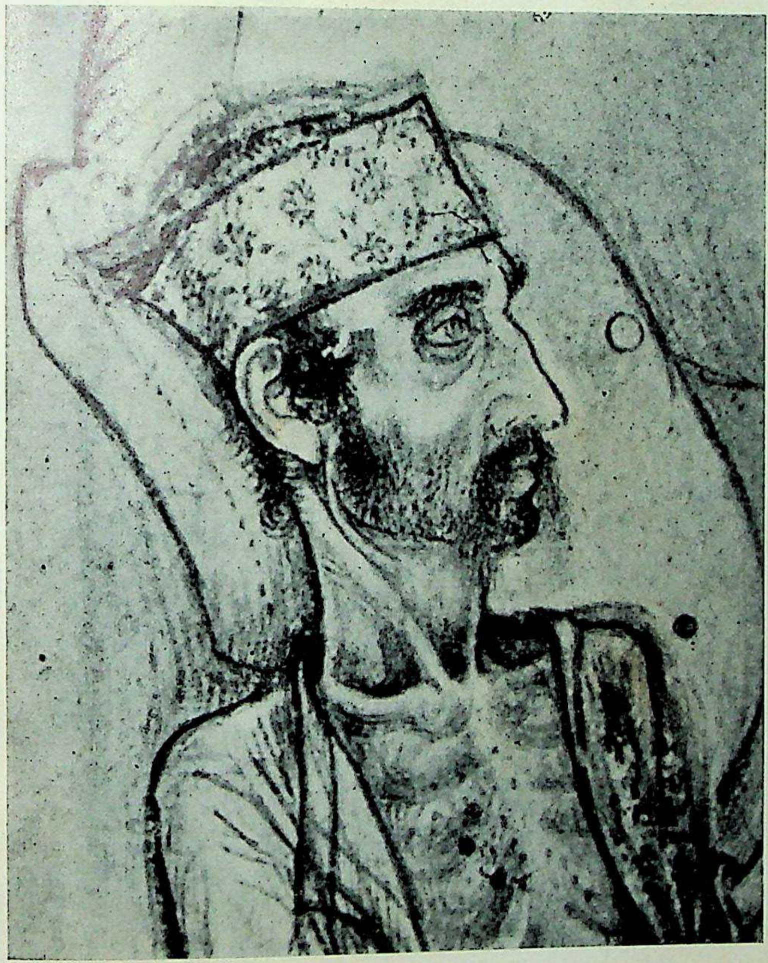
Rich in colour sense, due to the bold massing of vibrant colours, often opulent and ornate in utterance, they quiver with nervous energy owing to the very sensitive outline. The figures are stylized and show a distinct bias for the angular. The nose is sharp, pointed and prominent ; the eyes appear elongated and protrude beyond the outline of the face (Pl. LXIV). The chest is broad, while the waist is noticeably thin. The childlike naïveté of these figures is endearing. Trees and clouds are rendered in an extremely conventional way which is decorative in effect. It is on the whole least realistic in aim. A large collection of illustrated manuscripts of the Jain scriptures like the *Kalpasutras*, ostensibly executed for rich patrons, have come down to us. Several peculiarities of this school influenced the Rajasthani style of painting.

RAJPUT PAINTING (16th-19th CENTURY A.D.)

This great school of painting flourished in Rajasthan (Bikaner, Jodhpur, Gwalior, Malwa etc.) and in the several hill states of Punjab (known popularly as the Pahari style). Rajput painting, though a continuation of the ancient Indian tradition, was markedly influenced in its technique by the Mughal painting with which it was contemporaneous. In its turn, it influenced Mughal painting too—which in its origin and early manifestation was Persian—and caused it to acquire its unmistakable Indian character. The Rajput school was purely Hindu in feeling, lyrical in tone and truly national in appeal. It was inspired by the *bhakti* mysticism, mainly Vaishnavite, found reflected in the works of mystic poets like Jayadeva, Chandi Das, Vidyapati, Sur Das and Mira Bai. Its subject-matter was based on folk-lore, mythology, religion, music and erotics. The Ragamala (musical modes) and Nayikas (types of heroines) are favourite themes in the several sets of paintings which have come to light. The Ragamala pictures are pictorial representations of the musical modes. Every *raga* and *ragini* (*ragini* is a minor musical mode and often called the "wife" of a *raga*) are deified as deities. The iconography and the sentiment or mood associated with each *raga* and *ragini* are embodied in the form of *dhyana ślokas* (invocatory verses) which are composed either in Sanskrit or in

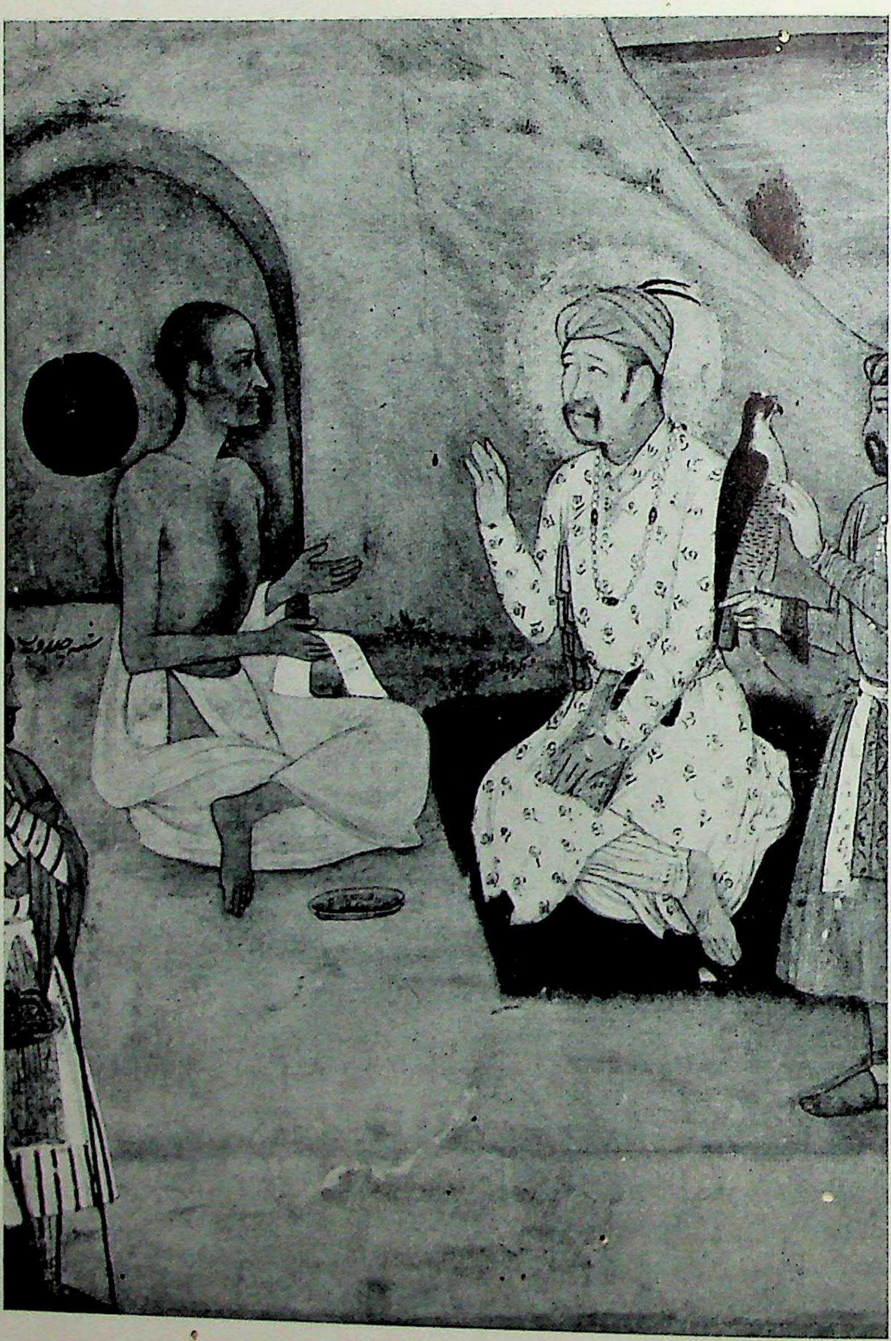
Hindi. The pictorial presentations are mostly illustrations of these verses. For example, *Todi Ragini* is pictured as a lady separated from her lover, who has betaken herself to the woods where she pours out her sad feeling of loneliness to the accompaniment of the strains of the *vina* on which she delicately plays. Attracted by her music woodland deer surround her. Holding the *vina* in one hand, *Todi Ragini* is represented as feeding the deer with tender shoots of grass. *Raga Malava* is pictured as an exceedingly handsome person, radiant with youthfulness and engaged in the sport of love. A lady engaged in the act of drawing the likeness of her absent lord and thus seeking relief from the pain of separation from him is *Ragini Dhanasri*. In the Ragamala pictures was achieved a subtle blending of music, painting and poetry which is a rare artistic synthesis.

Sringara (the erotic sentiment) was the subject of much detailed study at the hands of Indian poets and rhetoricians. Naturally this led to an analytical study of the different types of women, their psychic states and reactions in relation to different situations of love such as separation from the lover or union with him. When the heroine is unable to bear the separation any longer, is moved by intense passion and longs for union with her lover, she goes out in search of him even at dead of night, alone, unmindful of the terrors on the way such as the snake lying across the path, the goblins lurking on tree tops or the thunder and lightning that presage a squall. Such a one is called *Abhisarika*. *Vasakasayya* is the lady who waits for the return of her lord—who is certainly long in coming—with the bed all made and her toilette all finished. The one who has quarrelled with her lover because she suspects that he is unfaithful to her (he has been absent all night long) is the *Abhisandita*. She refuses to be appeased when her lover puts in a late appearance and so the lover departs. When he is gone, she is sunk in despair and regrets that she did not make up her quarrel with him. Thus in these pictures, the emotional states of love, its throbbing drama and its subtle charms, are portrayed. Never has the rapture of dalliance, the sweet poignancy of expectation, the grace of maidenly charm, the pangs of separation and of unrequited love been made the subject of such intimate and moving



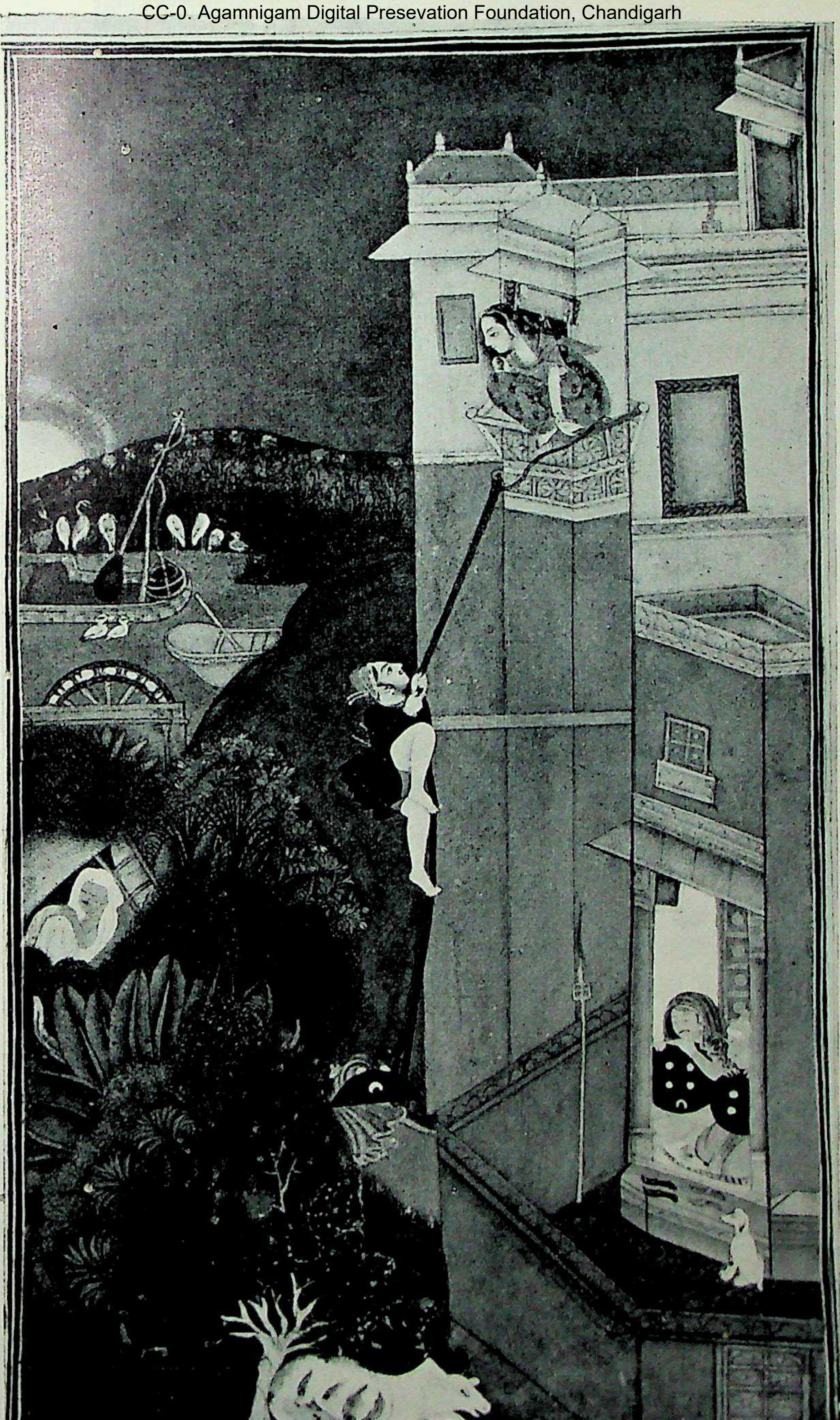
LXIX. Death of Inayat Khan (detail), Mughal, A.D. 1618

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



LXX. Akbar and Chidrup (Detail), Mughal, 17th Century

Fogg Art Museum, U.S.A.



LXXI. Clandestine meeting, Rajasthani,
late 18th Century A.D.

Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay

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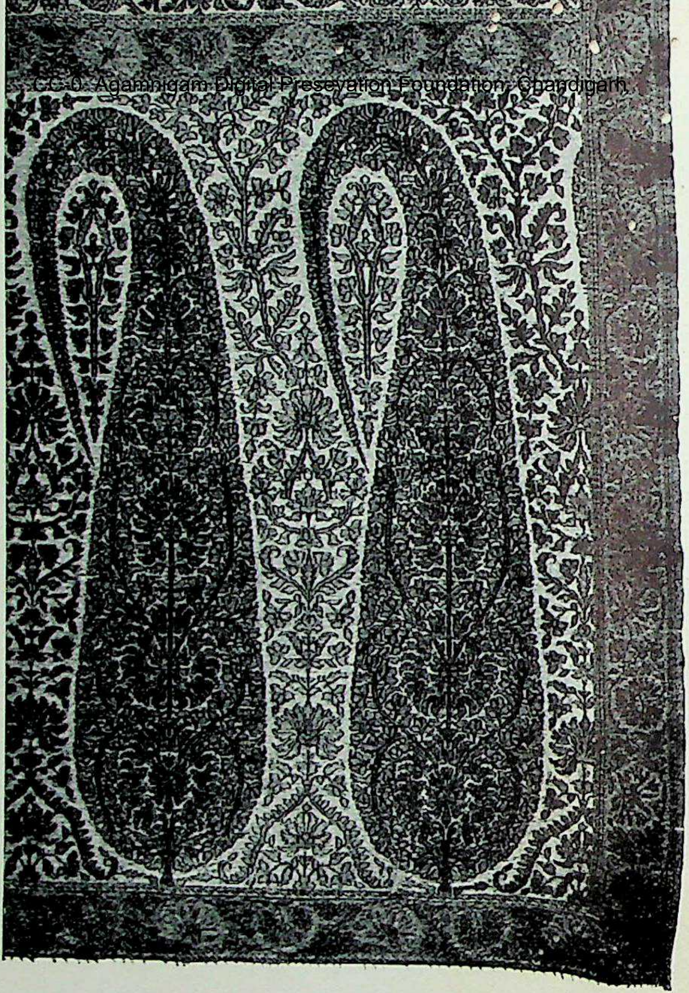
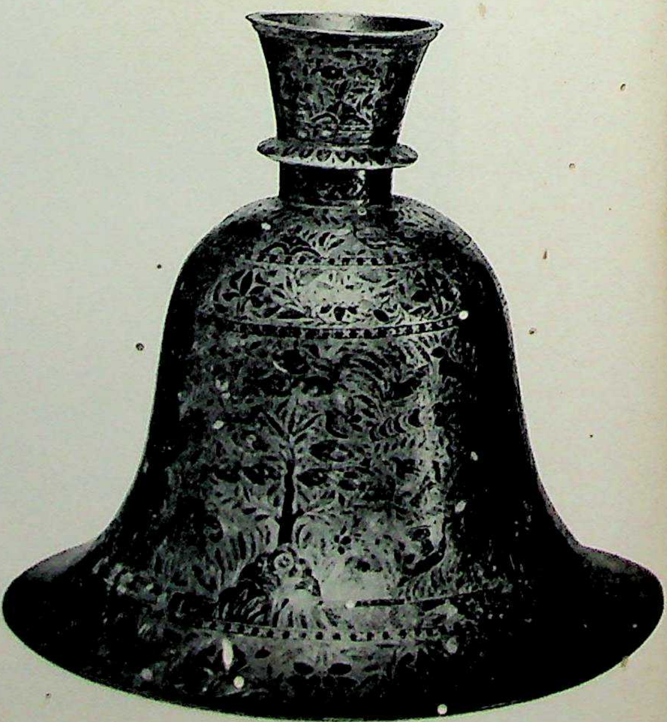


LXXII A. Textile design, Kashmir

Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay



LXXII B. Hookah Stand

Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

pictorial studies. In the scenes presented in a great many of the Ragamala pictures and in the Nayika series where *Sringara* or the love emotion is the theme, there is hardly any distinction noticed. In both these series of paintings, the hero is invariably Krishna and the heroine Radha. By this simple device all these paintings acquire a mystic significance where Krishna stands for the *Paramātman* the Oversoul, and Radha for the human soul, ever in search of Him but very often losing Him through *māya* (*avidya* or ignorance).

Rajput painting reached its most distinguished phase in the Punjab hills where various local schools flourished during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly at such well-known centres as Kangra,[30] Basholi, Punch and Jammu. Apart from mythological themes, the paintings of the hill states like those of the Mughal school cover a wide variety of theme from court life such as royal expeditions, portraits of notabilities, marriage and royal processions, court scenes, music and dance parties, toilet and bathing scenes and seasonal festivities.[31] The output of the various Rajput schools of painting is truly enormous, and notable for their stylistic variations (LXV-LXVII & LXXI). The significant achievements of this great branch of Indian painting have never been so well and truly assessed as in the noble words of Dr. Coomaraswamy : "What Chinese art achieved for landscape is here accomplished for human love. The arms of lovers are about each other's necks, eye meets eye, the whispering *sakhis* speak of nothing else but the course of Krishna's courtship, the very animals are spell-bound by the sound of Krishna's flute and the elements stand still to hear the *ragas* and *raginis*."

Whatever be the theme, in expression Rajput art is always lyrical and passionate. It reflected faithfully the Vaishnava mystic belief that "what you cannot find in familiar things you cannot discover anywhere else and that if beauty is not apparent in these it cannot be discovered in strange and distant objects". Again, as Dr. Coomaraswamy points out, Rajput art "creates a magic world where all men are heroic, all women are beautiful and passionate and shy, beasts both wild and tame are the friends of man, and trees and flowers are conscious of the footsteps of the bridegroom as he passes by. This magic world is not unreal or fanciful, but a world of imagination and eternity, visible to all men who do not refuse to see with the transfiguring eye of love."

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[30] Nurpur, Guler and Tira-Sujanpur were the chief centres of Kangra painting.

[31] Bāramāsa (Twelve Months) paintings depict the march of the seasons showing the changes in nature and in the life of the people.

MUGHAL PAINTING

The painting that flourished at the court of the Mughal emperors (A.D. 1526-1856) is one of the more widely known phases of Indian art. In this we have for the first time an entirely secular art. A very considerable number of paintings of this period exist both in India and abroad in the many private as well as public collections. This makes the study of the rise, growth and decay of this school and its distinctive contribution comparatively easy. This school of painting owes its genesis to the patronage extended by emperor Humayun (1530-1556) to the two Persian artists of Shiraz, Mir Sayyaid Ali and Abdus Samad. They remained in India as the court painters of Humayun. They executed their work in the manner of the Persian Safavid school. Humayun commissioned these artists to illustrate the work of Hamzanamah or the story of Amir Hamza. This was a colossal undertaking and was completed in twelve volumes of hundred illustrations each. This work took several years and was only completed during the reign of Akbar who succeeded Humayun. Meanwhile the Mughal rule, which commenced in A.D. 1526, was in its formative period and, shedding the role of a foreign agency, was getting stabilised as an Indian power. The most perceptible change in this direction took place during the glorious reign of Akbar who was a very far-sighted, tolerant and cultured ruler. During his reign (A.D. 1556-1605) the Mughal empire extended over a large part of India, which created more peaceful and secure conditions propitious for the growth and development of art and culture. Fortunately for India, Akbar himself was deeply interested in painting, in the religions and in the ancient wisdom of India. For the first time in the course of several centuries of Muslim rule in India, the culture and learning of India found an honoured place in the highest circle of the Muslim rulers of India, which not only brought about a rapprochement between the Hindu and the Muslim but was extremely fruitful in evolving a composite culture. Nowhere does it manifest itself more eloquently than in the sphere of painting and architecture leading to a grandeur of achievement surpassing that of all Muslim art outside India.

It was during this alchemic age of Akbar's rule that the Persian painting at the court of Humayun was transformed into the Indo-Persian art of the Mughal school. In spite of the foreign elements, it became predominantly Indian by the close of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. Nearly a hundred artists, a good many of them Hindu, were engaged by Akbar as his court painters. These Hindu artists were drawn from different parts of India like Gujarat, the Punjab and Kashmir and were extremely well trained in the native traditional schools. Abul Fazal, the court chronicler and great friend of Akbar, pays a handsome tribute to the skill of the Hindu court painters which indeed is an indication of the excellence of the intensely cultivated art of the traditional school of Indian painting which had managed to survive. "Their pictures," says Abul Fazal, "surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them." It is the fusion of this great traditional art and skill with that of the Persian school which evolved the truly Indian school of Mughal painting. Akbar was followed by Jehangir (A.D. 1605–27) whose love of painting surpassed even that of his illustrious father. He prided himself as the greatest connoisseur of the age. The deep interest and skilled judgment of Jehangir contributed in no small measure to the brilliant achievement of this period which has never been excelled in the history of Indo-Islamic painting. A great many painters were engaged in illustrating manuscripts and also in painting notable events of the court such as durbars, festivals, hunting scenes, expeditions and battle scenes, rare birds animals, plants and flowers and portraits of individuals (Pls. LXVIII, LXIX & LXX). A large number of excellent paintings on these subjects exist in various collections. But Mughal painting was an art that depended entirely on court patronage and whenever this was lacking it withered and shrivelled. Jehangir was followed by Shah

Jehan (1627–58). His main interest was architecture. The maturity that was discernible in Jehangir's time reached over-ripeness in Shah Jehan's days and soon decay set in during the reign of the bigoted and puritan emperor Aurangzeb. He rang the death knell of Mughal painting as also of the empire. Artists of the Imperial court had to migrate to distant provincial courts in search of patronage. Thus provincial schools came into being notably at Lucknow and Patna in the North and in the Deccan in the South. Mughal pictorial influences travelled as far south as Mysore and Tanjore by the end of the eighteenth century.

The Imperial library of the Mughals contained a vast and rare collection of paintings executed by the Mughal artists. Amongst them were priceless illustrated manuscripts containing thousands of paintings like the Hamzanamah, Chingiznamah, the Zafarnamah, the Rāmāyana, Nala-Damayanti, the Baburnamah, the Akbarnamah etc., apart from a large collection of portraits, palace scenes, hunting scenes and animal and bird studies. This great and magnificent collection was looted and dispersed during the sack of Delhi and the disorder that reigned in the wake of Nadir Shah's invasion.

Mughal painting was largely an aristocratic court art and a faithful chronicler of the pomp, pageantry and personalities of the court. Realism was its keynote. The works of the Mughal painters were invariably accurate and careful studies. They took particular care in the delineation of the face which has rarely been excelled. The hands and fingers are exquisitely treated and are expressive of grace and refinement. The sensitive outline and the subtle modelling of the features obtained by delicate, carefully blended tones so as to bring out the character of the person depicted are noticeable traits of Mughal painting, apart from the richness and pleasing combination of colours. As observed by Dr. Coomaraswamy it has "a gay sense of joy in the beauty of the world and the constant impulse of an art that is still developing possessing vigour of youth and growth".

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